NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

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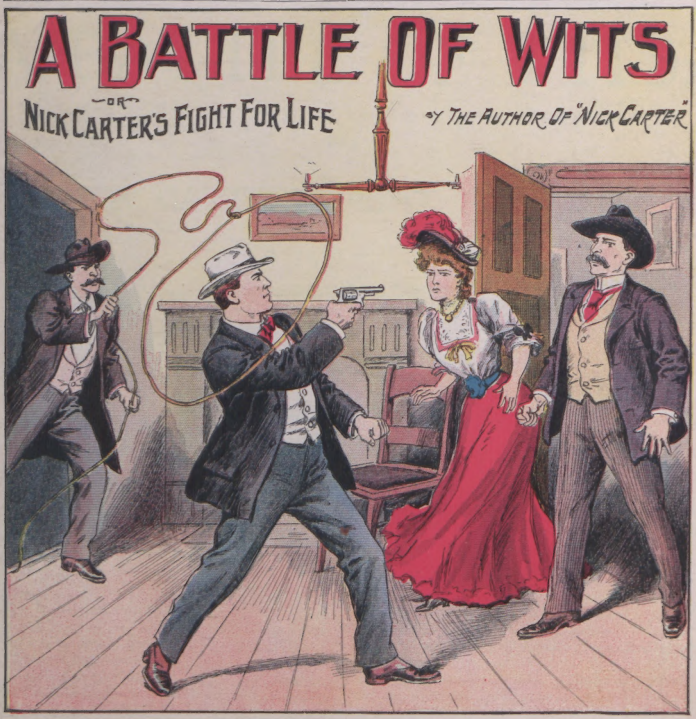
A BATTLE OF WITS

—OR— NICK CARTER'S FIGHT FOR LIFE

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



Without lowering his weapon, Nick turned about. He was too late. A lasso shot out from a muscular hand and fell over his shoulders.

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A BATTLE OF WITS;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S FIGHT FOR LIFE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

STABBED IN THE BACK.

Nick Carter's office telephone rang sharply one morning in April, just as the famous detective was preparing for a long walk in the open air. He took the receiver down and asked:

"Who is it?"

"Chief of police," came the quick reply.

"Good morning, chief. What can I do for you?"

"I have a favor to ask," came over the wire. "As you know, we are rushed with work just at this time, and there is an important matter over on Second Avenue which I wish you would look into."

"Is it a new case, chief?"

"Not an hour old."

"What is the nature of it?"

"Murder—a bad one, at that."

"Where did it take place?"

"At the Morgan apartment building."

"Have you any details?"

"All we know is that it occurred some time in the night. In fact, the suite where the murder was committed, and where the body still lies, has not been entered since the discovery of the crime."

"Then the case is new enough. But how did all this come about? There is usually a fool-rush on such occasions."

"Oh, some one looked through a transom and saw the occupant of the suite lying before a grate with a knife in his back and a pool of blood on the rug. He ran screaming to the janitor, and that gentleman had sense enough to guard the room until my men got to the house."

"Are your men there now?"

"Yes; Bradley and Clinton. They telephoned from the Morgan not two minutes ago, and I ordered them to keep out of the rooms until I could communicate with you."

"Both good men," said Nick. "Kindly place them under my orders, and I will go up immediately."

Nick rang off and started for the Morgan, on Second

Avenue. He had no idea, however, of being cheated out of his morning walk, so he swung over to the Bowery and turned into Second Avenue at Sixth Street. A few blocks above that point he overtook Chick, his assistant, who was moving along in the same direction.

"This is lucky," said Nick. "How does it come that you are here just in the nick of time? I was about to telephone for you."

"Why," replied the assistant, "I think we must be headed for the same place, that is, if you are going up on the murder case. A patrolman gave me a tip that there was something doing up here."

Nick pondered a moment.

"What murder case?" he asked.

"The cutting affair a little farther up."

"What do you know about the details of the case?" asked the detective, wondering how the story got to the patrolman so soon.

"I guess there is little to know at present," was the reply. "Two men go up a stairway in broad daylight, and a moment later one of them comes tumbling down dead, with a knife sticking in his back. Rather a desperate piece of business for little old New York, eh?"

So there had been two murders, and in each case the victim had been stabbed in the back and the weapon left in the wound!

"I infer that you are out on the case," continued Chick.

"I am out on a murder case," replied Nick, "but not the one to which you refer. See, there is a crowd about a stairway, so that must be the place you seek. My case is at the Morgan, directly across the street."

"I wonder if the cases are in any way connected?" asked Chick. "It seems strange that there should be two killings in the same block at about the same time. Perhaps you had better stop here a moment."

The body of the murdered man still lay upon the walk when the detectives arrived at the scene of the crime. A deputy coroner had just reached the spot. Nick asked for a brief delay in the removal of the body and began an investigation.

A large crowd had gathered, and the detectives at first worked with difficulty, but the walk was finally cleared.

The body was that of a strong man, stricken down in full health. The face was partly concealed by a heavy beard, which Nick examined with a smile. The clothing was both cheap and new. A small diamond glittered on the bosom of the coarse shirt. Nick lifted one of the hands and made a close examination of it.

"Deliberate murder," whispered Chick.

"Robbery and murder," added Nick. "Observe that the inner pocket of the coat on the right side is turned out, as if a hasty search had been made."

"The fact that the diamond remains on the shirt-front shows that the robbery was not of the ordinary kind," added Chick.

Nick turned to one of the policemen in charge.

"Is there any one here who saw the man fall?" he asked.

The policeman gazed indifferently at the detective, as if wondering how an ordinary citizen could find the nerve to question an officer of the New York police force.

Nick passed out a card, and in a second the officer was all attention.

"Yes, sir," he said, in answer to the question, "here is a young man who saw the two men go up-stairs, and who saw the body come down, though he is trying to deny the whole thing. I am holding him as a witness."

"I happened to be standing here," said the young man, seeing that the detective was some one of no ordinary authority, "but I did not notice the men when they went up the stairs. I saw this body come tumbling down, and that is all."

As he spoke, the young man moved his eyes warily about, as if seeking an opportunity of escape. He was dressed roughly, and seemed strange to the ways of the city, as was shown by his frequent changes of attitude toward the crowd which surrounded him. It was clear that he was not familiar with crowds, and that he was trying his best to seem thoroughly at home. He was dressed roughly, but his speech was that of an educated man. Nick looked him steadily in the eyes.

"Why were you standing here?" he asked.

"Oh, I was just looking over the city," was the reply.

The detective turned away, seeming to be looking in another direction, but he never lost sight of the face of the witness. As Nick turned, the young man's eyes became fixed on the Morgan Building, opposite, the place where the other murder had been committed.

"You are from the West?" asked Nick, turning again to the fellow.

"From Arizona. I am a cattleman."

"The dead man seems to have been in the same business," suggested Nick.

"I did not know him," was the short reply.

"You saw no one pass up the stairs?"

"No one that I can describe."

"He stood right there when they went up," declared a woman who had come down out of the building. "I was looking out of the window, and I saw him look at them, and I believe he said something to one of them, too."

"You are mistaken," said the young man, coolly.

Nick beckoned one of the officers to his side.

"This young man is lying," he said. "He may be merely trying to escape being called as a witness, or he may be trying to shield some one. Be sure that he does not get away."

"What gets me," said the officer in charge, "is that no trace of the murderer can be found up there," pointing to the building. "No one up there heard a word or a scuffle. No one seems to have seen the men in the stairway or in the hall above, and no one saw the murderer getting out of the building."

"There is a rear exit?" asked Nick.

"Yes, but the strange part of the affair is that painters are at work there, and they insist that no one passed them."

"How many painters?" asked Nick.

"Three," replied the policeman.

"There were only two this morning," declared the woman of the building.

Nick passed into the building and stood for a moment talking with the three painters. They seemed busy with their work, and did not look up.

Just then a cry came from the front, and Nick, fearful of what had taken place, made his way back to the street. He was met on the stairs by a rush of policemen, with Chick at their head.

"You must have seen him," said the assistant. "He came up the stairs a second ago, on the run."

"What are you talking about?" asked Nick. "No one has passed me. Whom are you chasing?"

"Why, the young man held as a witness," was the reply. "He got away, and ran up the stairs just now, and ran good and fast, too."

Nick drew Chick to one side and said: "Let the fellow go. The thing for you to do now is to get a perfect disguise and hang about this building. Watch the suite at the right of the stairs, on this floor."

CHAPTER II.

FROM DEATH VALLEY.

When Nick reached the sidewalk again, the body was being placed in an ambulance for removal to the morgue. The detective called the deputy coroner aside and talked with him for a moment, at the rear of the wagon. Then he turned to one of the officers.

"I want you to go to the morgue with this body," he said, "and remain there, in view of the body, until you are relieved. I will send a man up from my office within an hour. When you get to the morgue, keep out of sight if you can, but take care that you get a good description of every person who looks at the dead man."

"All right," replied the officer. "I will give any information I may have to the man you send up."

Arrived at the Morgan, Nick telephoned to his office and then took the elevator for the scene of the murder.

"Things are coming swift this morning," he thought. "There is a big sensation behind these two murders."

When he stepped from the elevator on the third floor of the building he was confronted by an excited crowd, standing at the door leading to the private hall of Suite No. 9, where the murdered man lay.

A burly but rather pleasant-faced man stood with his back to the door, his face to the crowd. As Nick approached he asked:

"You are the officer expected?"

Nick nodded.

"I am the janitor," said the other, "and the man who discovered the body. The detectives from central station are in the private hall."

He was about to unlock the door when Nick stopped him.

"Wait," he said. "When did you first discover that there was something wrong in yonder?"

"An hour or so ago. Just before I called up headquarters."

"What first attracted your attention?"

"Why, the man in this suite here, No. 10, called me in, all of a-tremble, and asked me to look through the transom over the door which connects the two suites. I did so, and saw the body of Mr. Hughart lying on the rug, a knife sticking into his back."

"Then the man in Suite 10 made the discovery?"

"Yes, sir, I suppose so."

"We may as well go in there and look that suite over," said Nick.

The janitor unlocked the door and the two entered. The rooms were immediately in the rear of Suite 9, and the two suites were connected by a door, now securely locked and bolted on the front side.

The detective mounted a chair and looked through the transom. The body still lay upon the rug. A gas-fire was burning in the grate, and the electric lights were on.

"Who occupies this suite?" asked Nick.

"Mr. Townley, a man who came here with Mr. Hughart."

"Friends, eh?"

"Yes, and partners in a mine."

"Was this door usually kept locked?"

"No; they passed back and forth a good deal. It was locked and bolted this morning from the other side, as you see it now, sir."

"Where did these men come from?"

"From Death Valley, they said."

"Gold-hunters?"

"Yes, sir, and they claim to have located a rich mine out there in the desert. They have the gold to show for it—gold in the form of nuggets."

"You saw the nuggets?"

"Often. Two of the best are used as scarf-pins, and hold diamonds of great value. They are peaches, sir."

"And Hughart and Townley each carried one?"

"Yes, sir."

"Brought on as samples, I suppose?"

"That is what they said, and very fine samples they

are, too. You see I have been out in the mining country, and know something about gold in its native state."

"Then the gold is genuine?"

"Undoubtedly, and the diamonds are, as I said before, peaches. I wish I owned a couple like them."

"These men were on good terms?"

"I think so. You see Hughart had the say about everything, and Townley kept his own counsel."

"You would know the pins anywhere?"

"Of course. There are not many like them in New York, or anywhere else, for that matter. The men were very choice of the pins. You will find Hughart's on the body in there now. I saw it glisten in the light of the fire."

"And I presume that Townley wears his pin?"

"I did not notice, on account of the excitement, I stippose. He is in there with the officers, and you may soon see for yourself. Don't you think it a strange case, sir? You see, the murder was not for robbery, for there is the valuable pin on the dead man's shirt. It's a wonder the murderer didn't take that. Don't you think so?"

"It does seem a little singular," replied Nick, who had been asking questions about the nugget pins just because he had discovered that the one worn by the dead man had not been appropriated by the slayer.

"I can't get it through my head, sir," said the janitor.

"How did Townley act when the body was discovered?" asked Nick.

"Pretty well knocked out, sir."

"What did he say?"

"He kept crying out that he had warned Hughart, time and again. He acted like a man gone mad, sir."

"Warned him against what, against whom? Did he say that?"

"He did not. Just said he had warned him, and said it many times."

"Has he a key to Hughart's suite?"

"Oh, no. There are only two keys, and I have one of them. Here it is. Oh, I must have left it in my room."

"When you leave here," said Nick, "go and get it." Then, in a moment:

"We may as well join the officers and take a look at the dead man. Don't go after the key until I dismiss you."

"Very well, sir. I know right where it is."

The detective and the janitor turned to the elevator, court and entered the private hallway leading to Suite 9, where they found Bradley and Clinton, the city detectives, and Townley, who seemed to be much excited.

"The maps will never be found now," he was saying. "He alone knew of the hiding-place. Just as he got ready to live, he was murdered."

Townley was a large man, and he had not changed his rough costume on arriving in New York. No nugget pin showed on his shirt-front. Nick asked him:

"You were Hughart's partner?"

Townley glanced keenly at the detective, looked at the city men, and made answer only after receiving an affirmative nod from one of them. He seemed suspicious as well as anxious.

"Yes, we were partners, and I warned him time and again."

"Against whom?"

"The Death Valley League. We were followed to New York by men who want our mine, by a band of desperate men from the desert."

"Where is your nugget pin?" asked Nick, springing the question after a keen look at the man before him.

"What do you know about my pin?" asked Townley. "That is my personal matter."

"Have you sold it?"

Townley's face flushed, but he made no answer.

"Did you wear it yesterday?"

Still no answer."

"Oh, well," said Nick, with a smile. "we shall know all about it in time. Have you seen the people you speak of —the people from the desert—since you arrived in New York? Have you seen them in this part of the city?"

Townley hesitated.

"You had better make answer," warned Bradley. "We are bound to get at the truth in time, you know."

"I don't like to talk about them," said Townley. "Yes, I know that we have both been trailed in this city, that they have been in this very house. We found it impossible to escape them."

"And Hughart knew this?"

"Yes, but Hughart was foolishly venturesome. He refused to be warned by me."

"You often talked about being pursued, I suppose?" asked Nick.

"Yes, often, but Hughart seemed to regard it as a joke; after all we had been through, too. He laughed at me when I warned him."

"And now you do not know where the papers concerning the mine are?"

"Who told you about our mine?" demanded Townley.

"You spoke of maps a moment ago," said Nick. "Are the maps to the mine missing?"

"Yes, for Hughart kept them hidden."

The party now entered the rooms where the dead man lay, and Townley bent over the body, saying that it was strange the slayer had not taken the valuable pin.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE DISCOVERY.

Nick Carter made a careful and painstaking examination of the body, and also of all the rooms in the suite, which consisted of a parlor, a sitting-room, an alcove

bedroom, a large closet, a small kitchen, and a bath-room. The bedroom and the closet opened from the parlor, the kitchen and the bath-room from the sitting-room.

Nick spent considerable time in the closet and at a dresser which stood in the front room. He finally stepped back to Townley, still standing by the body, carrying a coat taken from the closet and a number of collars taken from the dresser.

"This is Hughart's coat?" he asked. "These are his collars?"

"Certainly," said Townley. "I have seen him wear the coat, and I identify the collars by the size and shape."

The city detectives looked as if they would like very much to know what was coming off, but they asked no questions.

"Now," asked the detective, "when did you see Hughart last?"

"At 10 o'clock last night, after the departure of his visitors."

"So! He had company in these rooms last night?"

"Yes, people interested in the financing of the mine. New York men of wealth."

"Exactly. You did not hear what took place? You did not see the men?"

"I came in at the hour named. He told me who had been here."

"I see. How did he act? Was he in good health?"

"He complained of a headache, and remained on the couch, there, all the time I was in the room."

"How was his voice?"

"Hoarse and unnatural. But I don't see the point of all this."

Bradley and Clinton seemed to echo this thought.

"You were in this front room with him?" asked Nick, pointing to where the lounge stood, "and were alone in the suite?"

"We were there by the couch, and there was no one else here."

The detective drew Townley back to the closet and pointed inside.

"If a person, a tall man, dressed as a miner, or, at least, wearing miner's boots, had been standing there, back of the door, would you have seen him?"

Townley seemed startled at the thought.

"I think not, but there was no one there."

"And yet," said Nick, "at some time during the evening, a tall man with dark hair stood there in the closet. He wore heavy boots and changed his position frequently. The marks of the boot-nails are here in the soft flooring. He must have been here a long time, for there are many marks on the floor. See, he bumped his head against the high clothes-hooks, and some of the hairs caught."

The city detectives stood looking over Nick's shoulder, astonishment depicted on their faces. They were unfamiliar with such close work.

"The marks are genuine, all right," said Clinton presently.

"The boots were not new," continued Nick, "for some of the nails show wear, and some are missing."

Townley stood watching the detective with a strained look on his face.

"Was the man in there when Townley was in the room?" asked Bradley, in a moment.

"I haven't a doubt of it," replied Nick, with a smile.

"Then why did he spare him?"

"That will all come out in the wash," replied Nick. "Late in the evening, probably after Townley's last visit of the night to the rooms, the dead man tried on this coat, also a number of collars. They did not fit, and he gave up trying to get into the clothes and sat down before the fire to smoke."

"But I left Hughart ill," cried Townley. "How could he get up and try on his clothes and sit down and smoke? Why do you say that the clothes did not fit him? You are getting too deep for me, sir."

"Be patient a moment," said Nick. "As he smoked, he was stabbed in the back. Then the assassin searched the dead man's pockets and spent a lot of time looking over the place. He must have been here nearly all night."

"And I sleeping next door," said Townley, with a shudder.

"You knew Hughart well?" Nick asked of Townley.

"Of course, I knew him well," was the reply. "For years we worked and starved together in Death Valley. Why do you ask such questions?"

"Then examine the body of the man lying there, and tell me if it is the body of your friend and partner. Make no mistake, now."

Townley bent over the body with a slight scowl on his face.

Then he sprang to his feet, his eyes wild and glassy.

"That is not the body of Robert Hughart," he cried. "What does this mean?"

"It is the body of a heavier man than Hughart," said Nick. "He couldn't get into Hughart's clothes. He found the collars all too small. Then he tried to get into this coat, and tore out the armhole on the left side. Then he gave it up, as I have explained, and sat down to smoke. If Hughart was here at all last evening it was at an early hour."

"What can it mean?" demanded Townley. "Who was this dead man, and how did he get into this room? Is this the man I talked with last night? I don't believe it. Which of you detectives can explain this?"

"Do you recognize the dead man?" asked Nick.

"No," said Townley, who was undoubtedly telling the truth. Do you think he was mistaken for Hughart?"

Nick did not answer. He spoke a few words to the janitor and the latter stepped forward and examined the body. Then he said a few words to Nick, in a low tone.

"Where is your pin?" asked Nick, regarding Townley keenly. "Did you lose it?"

Townley only stared.

"Is that Hughart's pin on the dead man?" asked Nick.

Again Townley bent over the body to spring back with a cry of surprise.

"That is my pin!" he said.

"Did you know that Hughart was wearing it instead of his own?" asked Nick.

"I did not," was the reply. "To tell you the truth, my pin was stolen from me at a low dance-hall three days ago. I was ashamed to admit it a moment ago."

"Then how does it come here?" asked Clinton.

"I can't understand it," replied Townley. "Everything seems mixed here to-day. Oh, I know well enough what the finding of my pin on that body means," he added. "It means that I shall be connected with the crime in some way."

"That does not follow," said Nick. "You did not notice this pin last night?"

"I did not, but he was over there on the couch, where it wasn't very light, and, besides, he was covered with a bit of bedding."

"You heard no noise after you left the rooms—no noise in here?"

"In that case I should have returned," was the reply.

"You were trying to finance the mine," said Nick, "how was the deal progressing?"

"Hughart did all the business, but I understood that the deal was to have been closed to-day. Now I doubt if it can ever be closed. The maps are gone, and no one can find it without the maps. I wanted to know the hiding-place, but he wouldn't tell me."

A deputy coroner had arrived and was given charge of the room and the body. Townley was sent to headquarters as a witness. Then Nick drew the false beard and hair from the dead man. The hands and face were stained to represent a worker.

"That chap was made up right," said the deputy, with a laugh, as the detective worked away. "There are strange doings about these corners. The man who was murdered in the hallway over there was also disguised."

Nick's face showed annoyance.

"I hope you did not make the fact generally known," he said. "It is important that nothing should be said about that."

"Your assistant is the only one who noticed the disguise until we got to the morgue. "I said nothing about it."

"You acted discreetly," said Nick.

The detective now studied the face of the dead man with unusual care, taking note of all peculiarities and marks and making many measurements according to the rules of the Bertillion system of identification.

There was a long scar in the roots of the hair just back of the right ear. It had the appearance of a healed wound which had been inflicted with some dull instrument, as the raised line was irregular in shape.

Nick had an impression that he had seen the man in life, but he could not decide where or under what circumstances.

At last the coroner removed the body, leaving Nick alone in the suite. One of his first acts was to measure the marks on the closet floor.

"Made by a heavy man," he mused, "and a man with unusually large feet. The boots were worn considerably, and that shows that they were not purchased for the purpose of disguise, for in that case they would be new. On the inner ball of the right foot there are three nails missing, either driven in or worn off. The man is of a nervous temperament, for he moved about a good deal."

On the mantel he found the business card of a broker on lower Broadway, and this he placed in his pocket, together with a card found in the pocket of the dead man.

"This may give a pointer on the men he was doing business with," thought the detective. "In fact, it may be the card of the man responsible for this tragedy, or the card of the dead man himself. Anyhow, Hughart brought it here for a purpose."

After an hour's hard work Nick returned to his office, and there found his assistant waiting for him, a look of general disgust on his face.

"What luck?" Nick asked.

"Bad luck," replied Chick, with a troubled look.

"Your man got away, eh?"

"Sure, but he had plenty of help, all right."

"What about the tenants of the office to which I called your attention?"

CHAPTER IV.

A BATTLE OF WITS.

"The room is occupied by a lot of alleged doctors," replied Chick. "I say alleged because I went there for advice concerning an imaginary heart-trouble, and was not long in discovering that the main office man, the fellow who considered my case, knows nothing of the profession he pretends to practise. These doctors, so called, also occupy the room directly north of the one at the head of the stairs, also a string of rooms back of the north office and facing on the side street. These side rooms extend back to a narrow hall which opens on the rear entrance to the building, which is from an alley, and little used. Of course, seeing how easily the murderer

and the man wanted as a witness escaped from that building, you readily understand what all this means."

"You talked with one of the doctors?" asked Nick.

"Certainly. With the chap who seems to run the office. He is a burly brute, with hands like those of a brakeman. He never saw a medical book, much less studied one. He seemed nervous when I asked for treatment, and went at my chest like a cow playing billiards. He was suspicious, too. There is no doubt about that."

"Generally, what sort of a man is he?"

"Looks and acts like a desperado on a vacation. He is not an Eastern man, for he carries the brand of the far West in speech and manner."

"Was he alone in the office?"

"We were alone together in that one room, but others were in the north office. I heard them talking in whispers and moving about. I have no doubt they were listening at the other side of the connecting door."

"Then it is your idea that the murderer of the man who dropped down on the walk with a knife in his back sought refuge in the rooms you have described, also the man who is wanted as a witness?"

"I have no doubt of it. The alleged doctors are in some way connected with the killing of the man we saw on the pavement. How about the murder at the Morgan?"

Nick told of his discoveries at the Morgan, relating every detail showing possible clues to the assassin, and dwelling especially on Townley's expressed dread of the Death Valley League.

"That is a corker," said Chick, when the story was told. "Think of the nerve of those Death Valley bandits in daring to pursue these men to New York! Heretofore they have contented themselves with shooting men down in the desert, or robbing them and leaving them to die of hunger and thirst. And they seem to have found work right at the start, for the location of the gang right across the avenue from the rooms of the miners and the nail-marks in the closet seems to point to them as the murderers in both instances. Now, what has become of Hughart?"

"What is your notion?" asked Nick.

"Abducted, of course, but by whom?"

"Well, who were the men who were killed?" asked Nick.

"New York crooks, of course. Crooks in the disguise of miners."

"And who killed them?" asked Nick, with a smile.

Chick sprang to his feet.

"The bandits from Death Valley, of course," he said. "Unless Townley killed the one in Hughart's room," he added.

"Go on," said Nick.

"The bandits from Death Valley and the New York crooks are playing for the same prize," continued Chick, "and they got up against one another. That is the way I figure it out."

"Then who abducted Hughart?" asked Nick.

"Why, the crooks, and they disguised a man and sent him to Hughart's rooms to make a search for the maps," replied Chick. "That is easy enough."

"And then?"

"And the Death Valley gang caught on and followed him there. Yes, that must be the way of it. They followed him there and, killing him, made a search of the rooms. This case is coming on, all right."

"But the man murdered across the way? What about that?"

"The selection of the spot for the murder tells that story," replied the assistant. "Supposing, of course, that it is the Death Valley gang in those rooms, the murder must be laid at their door. Why he went there, why he was killed, are things which we have yet to learn. Anyway, there is a battle of wits on between a gang of murderers from the desert and a gang of crooks in New York. It looks like we must umpire this remarkable contest of brains and deviltry."

"What do you think of Townley?" asked Nick.

"That is a puzzle. Again, how did the dead crook get hold of Townley's pin? Did he tell the truth about the loss of it?"

"Let us suppose that he did," said Nick. "Then we have both pins in the possession of the crooks. One they stole. One they took from Hughart, after his capture. They might have got the pins mixed and put Townley's on the crook who was disguised instead of Hughart's."

"How did you come to know the difference in the pins?"

"The janitor, who is a very observing fellow, told me that the pin on the dead man was Townley's. Then Townley confessed to having been robbed of it in a low dance-hall."

"Well, the robbery was part of the plot, then," said Chick. "We seem to have the case mapped out, all right."

"It is all very plausible," said Nick, "but all our premises may be wrong. We know of the Death Valley people only from Townley, and he is not altogether above suspicion in the matter."

"Do you doubt his story?" asked Chick.

"I can't say," was the reply. "I shall find out before long. At any rate, there are two gangs after the maps and plans of the mine, and they are at sword's point. Hughart has disappeared, and two men have been killed. Did you see the painters at the building on the avenue?"

"No. They were gone when I went back. However, the manager of the building told me that no painters had

been employed by him. I thought I mentioned that before."

"And there were two painters before the murder, and three after the murder," mused Nick. "I guess it is easy to see how that came about. I wish we could get into those rooms on the quiet. We might find the clothes the painters wore."

"You think the murderer dashed into the rooms, put on the painter rig, and went back to work with the others until the chase was over?" asked Chick.

"I have no doubt of it," said Nick, "yet there is no proof."

"Of course, the rooms can be searched," said Chick. "That is easy of accomplishment, and the alleged doctors can be rounded up and investigated."

"Not now," laughed the detective. "We must insist on their helping us find Hughart first. They undoubtedly know a lot about the movements of the crooks."

"If we could only identify the dead men," said Chick. "That would, at least, give us a chance to look up their pals."

A soft knock came at the door of the inner room where the detectives were talking, and in response to a command to enter one of Nick's assistants stepped inside.

"I have just come from the morgue," he said.

"Both bodies are there?" asked Nick.

"Yes, both bodies are there, and people have already called for the purpose of identification."

Nick looked pleased at the information.

"Did you recognize any of the callers?" he asked.

"Only one. Tim Goodman was there, the noted burglar, just out of Sing Sing, you know."

"Ah! Did he identify the bodies?" asked Nick.

"He said that he had never seen either of them before, but he acted strangely when he first looked upon the dead faces. I should say, from his actions, that he knew both of the men in life."

"You left Bob there when you came away?" asked Nick.

"Yes, sir, with instructions to remain until relieved."

"Right," said the detective. "Relieve him at 8 o'clock to-night and remain there, out of sight, until you are in turn relieved."

The assistant bowed and turned away.

"Tim Goodman!" cried Chick, after the other had disappeared, "that means the Hall gang of phony men, and shows a bad crowd to deal with."

"Just the crowd to get after the miners," mused Nick.

Presently the detective went to the phone and talked for a few moments with the chief of police. Then he took from his pocket the janitor's key to Suite 9, which had been handed him before leaving the Morgan. The key was wrapped in cloth, and Nick unrolled it with care.

While he studied the key with a glass the telephone rang and he took down the receiver. In a moment he was back at his desk.

"What do you think of this?" he asked Chick, in a moment. "The boots Townley is wearing have been examined at headquarters. They are the boots which left nail-marks in Hughart's closet."

"Then we have one murderer already in custody," said Chick, with some excitement.

"And this key to Hughart's rooms, given me by the janitor, has very recently been packed in modeler's wax for the purpose of taking an impression. I found bits of the wax in Townley's rooms. What do you make of it, old man?"

Chick laughed.

"Then I was right a moment ago," he said. "We have the murderer of the false Hughart in custody at this moment."

CHAPTER V.

AN ODOR OF MUSK.

"My son," said Nick smilingly, "you must not jump at conclusions. All this may be readily accounted for by Townley. He is safe for the present, at any rate. Now, you are familiar with the Dominion Saloon and wine-room away up on the East Side?"

"The hangout of the Hall Gang of crooks? I should say so. I know every nook and corner in the place. We had a hot fight there not long ago, at the time Molly was sent over the road."

"Well, get into some sort of a rig and hang about the place. Go well armed with both weapons and money."

"What's the point of interest there just now?" asked Chick.

"There may be nothing doing, but we must find out whether there is or not. It was a member of the Hall Gang who acted so strangely at the morgue, you remember. You'll have to represent a tough mug, of course. Have one of the boys within call."

Chick hastened away, and Nick went back to the Morgan. The developments regarding the marks in the closet had given him an idea which he considered worth investigating.

He found the Hughart rooms just as he had left them, the janitor having been instructed to disturb nothing there.

After going over every room again, and to little purpose, Nick threw himself into an upholstered chair and leaned back.

The next moment he sprang to his feet and began an examination of the chair.

Bending his face to the head-rest, he found what he was looking for.

The odor of musk!

"Now, what was a woman doing here?" he asked himself.

A further study of the upholstered back of the easy chair revealed shreds of blue wool of fine texture.

There was no longer any doubt in the mind of the detective that the chair had been occupied by a woman not long before. Certainly no longer ago than the previous evening.

Here was a new element in the case.

Nick turned the key in the door connecting the two suites and pushed back the bolts which had been added for further security. In a moment he stood in the suite which Townley had occupied.

There were the bits of modeler's wax on the carpet. He collected all the pieces in view, and, holding them in his hand, bent over them. Then he turned away with one of his inscrutable smiles and sought the front suite.

Here he examined again the collars which had been rejected as too small by the man who had personated Hughart and had been murdered for his pains. Satisfied with his tests, Nick finally left the building and hastened to headquarters, where he was soon closeted with Townley.

"When you left Hughart's rooms last night," he said to the wondering man, "you passed through the connecting doorway, did you not?"

"Yes," was the reply. "I often did that."

"Then the door was fastened from the other side. Did you hear the key turn in the lock or the bolts shifted?"

"I certainly did not," was the reply. "It must have been done after I had fallen asleep."

"Are you satisfied that Hughart is giving you a fair deal with regard to the mine? Have you ever quarreled?"

"I have no fault to find with him," was the sullen reply.

"Have you anything more to add to what you said this morning about what you saw in Suite 9 last night?"

"Not a word. How long am I to be kept a prisoner here?"

"That depends on circumstances," replied Nick. "You will have to tell all you know before you are let out."

"I have already done so," was the angry reply.

"Pardon me for doubting your word," said Nick, "but there are still some unexplained circumstances connected with the matter. Do you now say that you were not in Hughart's rooms early in the evening?"

"I have told you all I know about the affair," was the surly reply.

"Very well," said Nick. "I shall have little difficulty in arriving at the truth. Hughart was not very communicative regarding the mine deal, was he?"

"He still lives," said Townley, "according to your notion. Why don't you find him and ask the questions you are asking me?"

"All in good time," replied the detective. "Who was the woman in his rooms last evening?"

"You'll have to ask him that," was the reply.

Nick turned away and went back to his apartments. As he entered by a private door Joseph met him.

"Telephone call for you, sir," he said.

Nick took down the receiver and found himself connected with the morgue.

"Lady called to look at the murdered men," was the report from his assistant.

"Is she there now?" asked Nick.

"She was a moment ago. Shall I follow her?"

"Did she identify the bodies?"

"No. She seemed agitated, however."

"Don't lose track of her," said Nick. "Call me again as soon as possible."

"The woman seems to be getting into the game good and strong," mused the detective. "If Bob only locates her."

Nick waited impatiently for ten minutes and then there came another call.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Sorry, but the woman got away," was the unsatisfactory report.

"How did that happen?"

"She just dropped out of sight. I was following her in the street, and she turned a corner and was out of sight when I reached the point. There were three cabs driving away, and, of course, I could not follow all of them."

"And you followed the wrong one?"

"Yes, sir. Sorry about it."

"Never mind," replied Nick. "We'll pick her up in another way. Can you give a description of the woman?"

"Quite old, with gray hair and a wrinkled face. Stooping shoulders and very bright black eyes for an old person."

"Disguised?" asked the detective.

"I think so."

"Did she come alone?"

"Yes."

"And was greatly agitated, you say?"

"Yes. Oh, she recognized the man killed at the Morgan, all right enough."

"Well, come to the office and await instructions. The game is up out there."

"All right, sir."

"Now, this is a fine mix-up," mused Nick. "I wonder how the doctors up on Second Avenue are getting along? I may as well find out."

It was getting dark when the detective reached the building where the man had been murdered in the hall-

way. There were lights in the windows of the rooms facing the side street, but the room at the head of the stairs appeared to be closed for the night.

Nick, who was very slightly disguised, ascended the stairs and knocked at the door. There was no answer, and he knocked again.

Then a light showed under the door and a voice called out:

"What do you want?"

"Is the doctor in?" the detective asked, in a faint voice.

"Yes. What is it?"

"I want some medicine," still more faintly.

Then came the sound of whispering voices.

"We must play the game," some one said.

"All right, close that door and let him in."

In a moment Nick was in the office, which was dimly lighted and occupied by only one person, a muscular man.

"We were just closing," said the alleged doctor. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"I am faint," was the reply. "Give me something to help me get home. I was just passing your office when the illness came over me."

"Oh, I'll have you all right in a moment," said the alleged doctor. "Better try a little liquor. That will help some."

"I feel pretty bad——"

Nick ceased speaking and fell to the floor, seemingly in an unconscious condition.

In an instant there was confusion in the office. The man who had been talking with the detective called out, and a door connecting with the north room was thrown open, letting a flood of light into the apartment.

"What's up?" demanded a heavy voice.

"Man fainted," was the reply. "I told you not to let him in. What is to be done now?"

"Place him on the couch and leave him alone for a moment. "He'll come out all right in time. If he doesn't we can dump him out into the hall."

The conversation from this point could be heard by Nick, but the speakers moved too much in unison with their actions to make the matter of what was going on in the other room. It is supposed that

"It's our luck," he heard some one saying.

CHAPTER VI.

FIGHTING FOR LIFE.

"It isn't no luck about it," said another voice. "We have been careless, and we didn't take advantage of it. As a result we're in worse shape now than the day we came here. Luck is action at the right time."

"That's a very good definition," thought Nick.

The men who stood over Nick now tossed him upon a couch and hovered about him.

"I have seen the fellow before," said one of them, his voice drowning the talk in the north room, though the door was still open."

"Pshaw," replied the other. "He's just a mechanic, and you may see a thousand like him every day."

As has been said, the detective's disguise was very slight, consisting only of a coarse suit of clothes, such as iron-workers wear, and plenty of dirt on his face and hands. Knowing the part he would have to play at the rooms of the alleged doctors, he had used nothing which might be discovered during his period of assumed unconsciousness.

"Just the same," replied the other, "I have seen that face before. I believe it was this morning, when the crowd was here, and I have an idea that this is one of the fellows who came to the back stairs and talked with us there."

"Then he may be a de——"

There was a moment's silence, caused by a swift motion of the hands, conveying a warning to the speaker.

"If he is," Nick heard in a faint whisper, "he is shamming now. Be careful what you say. If I thought there was any game in his being here, I'd get out the knife."

"There has been enough of that," whispered the other. "Wait. There is a way of finding out about this."

The next instant Nick, lying helpless on the couch, knowing that to move the lash of an eye meant instant death, felt the sharp point of a pin entering his arm. Although the pain was considerable, he did not move.

"He's all right," said the fellow, in a moment, speaking a little louder. "No conscious man could stand that for an instant. I shoved the pin in with all my strength."

"And I shall remember the kindness," thought Nick, "when the right time comes."

"If the chap is so knocked out as all that," said the voice of the man Nick had talked with in the office, "what are we to do with him?"

"Dope him and leave him in the street," was the reply.

"The boys might drop him when they go up to the joint we've been watching."

Nick listened intently, but no name was mentioned.

"Well, get out the chloroform. That will fix him."

Now the detective had no notion of being chloroformed, but how to avoid it was the question. If he remained passive, the thing would be accomplished. If he reached the stairs and the street by a quick dash, he would leave his work there only half-done. He decided to take chances.

He could spring away and fight his way out at the last moment, but he meant to get a look into the north rooms, if possible.

His usual good luck aided him in this, apparently, for, as he lay, expecting every instant to feel the drug on

his face, a loud knocking came on the door opening into the hall, and a voice called out:

"Open up, here."

"What next?" asked one of the men. There was no reply. The talking in the north room suddenly ceased.

"The devil is to pay to-night," said one of the men, in a moment. "Here, wheel this couch into the other room. He must not be seen here. They will think we have been murdering him. Hurry."

"Pshaw! This is a doctor's office, isn't it? Let him alone."

But this advice, which seemed pretty good to the detective, from the standpoint of the men he was dealing with, was not followed, and the couch began moving toward the north room, propelled by a sturdy pair of arms.

"Open up, here!"

Again the loud demand at the door.

"What do you want?" was asked.

"I want to get a friend tinkered up."

"Where is your friend?" asked one of the men.

"Out here. He got his block bumped good and plenty in a fight. Hurry up."

The couch was by this time in the north room, with the door closed, but the onward motion continued. Nick knew that he was being taken to one of the side rooms farther back, which was just what he wanted.

In a moment all sound from the main office was shut out. Then a voice said:

"There's the chloroform. Dope him good and plenty. If he comes to life again tie him up. I am suspicious of the fellow."

"If you leave the quantity to me," said the other, "I'll fix him so there will be no danger of his giving us trouble."

"I don't care what you do with him," said the other voice, and then the door was closed.

Nick realized that he was alone with an outlaw who meant murder.

So long as there was only one, however, the detective had little fear. If the people in the front offices would only make noise enough to shut out the sounds of a struggle, all would be well.

He heard the man move to a distant part of the room and opened his eyes a trifle.

A chuckle from his enemy followed the act.

Had he been discovered?

If so, the outlaw did not reveal the fact by word or motion.

He moved quietly about the room, evidently preparing the chloroform which was designed to put the detective out of business permanently.

The quick glance the detective had caught of the room showed him that it was next to the side room, and that it had two doors, one to the front and one to the rear.

On a table near the couch were a number of articles which seemed photographed on his brain in the short time his eyes rested upon them.

But before he could think over the situation, almost before he could realize the importance of what he saw, the man was upon him.

He braced himself and waited for the first touch of the cloth holding the drug.

When it came it was accompanied by another chuckle.

"Oh, you're awake, all right," the fellow said. "I saw you open your eyes a second ago. If you move I'll give you the knife. Lie still and take your dope, you bum detective. There. How do you like——"

The sentence was never finished.

As the man bent over him with the cloth in his hands, Nick opened his eyes and threw out his arms, catching the outlaw around the body, with his arms pinioned to his sides.

The hand which held the cloth relaxed for an instant, and Nick shifted his head so that it fell upon the couch where his head had been.

Then, exerting all his wonderful strength and dexterity, the detective whirled from under the fellow, turned him, and ended by holding him face down, his nose and mouth buried in the folds of the cloth holding the chloroform.

Struggle as he might, the outlaw could not release himself, nor could he utter a sound to summon assistance. In a very short time his struggles ceased, and Nick knew that he had nothing more to fear from him.

He listened at the door for a moment. A quarrel of some kind was in progress. The toughs who had sought the assistance of the medical men, as they supposed, were resenting the treatment they were receiving.

Nick moved about the room for a moment, placed in his pocket the articles which had attracted his attention, glanced hastily through a closet opening from the apartment, and opened the rear door.

As he did so the front door opened, and a husky outlaw bounced into the room.

"Hurry out," he began. "There's likely to be a gun-play with——"

Then he saw his confederate lying unconscious on the lounge, saw the rear door open, and, suspecting the truth, sprang forward.

Nick met him with a crashing blow on the temple, and he fell to the floor like a dead man.

The sounds of strife in the outer rooms were now on the increase, and Nick decided to make his escape while he could.

He closed the door and moved through two smaller rooms, lighted only by the lamps in the street. At last he came to a door which was locked.

As he worked with his picklock the sound of hurrying feet came to his ears.

The crooks had overpowered the man only to attack and were in hot pursuit.

At last the lock gave way, and Nick dashed into a narrow hallway connecting with the rear exit.

He found the door locked also, but a bullet crashed through it, barely missing his head. Without returning the fire, Nick leaped down the stairway, which turned to the right half-way down, and in a moment was out in the little pen of a yard.

He cleared the high fence with one bound, and found himself in the street.

"Close call," he muttered. "I guess those fellows are from Death Valley, all right."

Nick lost no time in getting around the corner, for the outlaws were now in the yard, and in a minute he saw whirling up Third Avenue in a cab which he had heard standing near the corning of the side street.

"It will be quick work from now on," he thought, "for the outlaws are now aware that their little doctor-joint is under suspicion, to say the least."

After giving a number of blocks he entered a hack.

CHAPTER VII.

WILD-WEST MANNERS.

Nick Carter was not in a position properly suited to his next piece of work, so when the cab stopped on Third Avenue it was at a building in which the detective kept an office for just such emergencies. Here he found an assistant waiting for him.

"Have been here, commissioner calls, the three-town officer," said the assistant, "and all from this part of the city, as I came up here in the hope of finding you."

"What is it all about?" asked the detective, busy with a new disguise which had that of a waiter for a result and few moments.

This is the favorite costume of the detective when doing night work among saloons, for the face makes an easy study of a small mustache, which can be instantly removed, and a wide collarless. The vest is low cut and reversible, rather loud checks on one side and modest dark-brown on the other.

"The people who called," said the other, in answer to the question, "regarding wanted to give any kind as to what was wanted. Chick, however, said that there would be a change at the place where he was stationed."

Nick laughed lightly.

"I rather think he is right about that," he said. "I imagine that there will be changes all along the line to-night."

Nick went to the phone at once as he had completed his business and called up the office. Two-bits was at the phone.

"Come down here and watching," said Nick. "I have a task here on the hand and see what is going on. I will be able to put into the patrol rooms up way of the back entrance. Don't get into a mix-up. Just keep an eye on the fellows and trail them if they go out, leaving the other man there."

"There's Chick on the phone now," came over the wire. "I'll call up your number in a minute."

Nick hung up the receiver and waited. Presently the call came.

"I'm at the Dominion," said Chick, "and there's doings here."

"What do you call doings?" asked Nick.

"Everything is under cover yet, but they are expecting trouble from some source. I think they are getting ready to make a quick get-away."

"How about the rooms above the place?"

"They are packing up, all right, but there seems to be a difference of opinion as to the best course to pursue. That is stopping the move a little."

"We may have something to say about their getting away," replied Nick. "How are you working up there?"

A laugh came over the phone.

"I'm doing pretty well, thank you," replied Chick. "I've got a job as waiter, and I'm admitted to the wine-rooms up-stairs. You ought to see me sling beer."

"Crowd there?"

"The gang is gathering, and there are guns in sight. I guess they suspect a visit from the men of the desert."

"All right," said Nick. "I guess they won't be disappointed. Good-by. You will see a merry rounder up there pretty soon."

Nick sat down and studied out the situation for a time.

"If they are getting ready to leave," he thought, "they have the papers and the maps of the desert mine. Now, the question is: How did they get them? Did Hughart surrender them to save his own life? Did the fool confide them to the women? Did Dorothea Dean carry the papers and maps away after all?"

No solution of the problem suggesting itself, the detective returned to the street, took a cab, and was presently within a block of the Dominion, which was a saloon operated in the interest of one of the toughest gangs in New York.

Here he dismissed the cab and strolled up to the place he sought. He did not enter immediately, however. Assuming to be under the influence of liquor, he stood for a time in front of the saloon, leaning on passing strangers, and at the show windows in the windows.

A perfect procession of crooks was passing into the place, and Nick was waiting to attract the attention of some of them. Presently he had his wish, for a well-dressed man known to the police professionally as "Handy" called him to the doorway.

"Come there!" cried the crook. "You can't see half of the show from the outside. Come in and have a drink."

Nick looked up with a drunken dignity which set the [illegible] laughing.

"I don't know you," he said.

"Come in and get acquainted, then," was the laughing reply. "What do you expect to get standing out there looking at the paper lions? You can see the real thing on the inside. Admission free! Come and have a sniffer."

"You're all right!" cried Nick. "I'm choice of me company, but I'll have a drink with you. You're all right."

They walked into the place together and took seats at a table. The room was a large one, and was well filled with customers. In front was a cigar-stand, shut off from the room proper by a high screen with mirror panels. Back of this was a long bar, and all along the side and clustered in the rear were tables. Just at the end of the bar an open staircase led to the rooms above.

Sitting at the table with the confidence man, Nick saw Chick passing up and down the staircase with beer and wine on trays. The assistant gave a quick glance at Nick's table, but did not seem to recognize him.

Nick does not drink intoxicating liquor, so when the wine was brought at the command of the crook, he was seized with a coughing-fit and succeeded in spilling most of the contents of his glass.

"We'll have another," said the detective, drawing forth a roll of bank-notes which caused the eyes of the confidence man to open wide. The fellow thought that the money was certain to come his way before the night was over.

Glancing about the room, Nick saw that those present were gathered in little groups, talking earnestly and in whispers. They all appeared to be very well known to each other.

Nick noticed that two muscular fellows kept near the door.

The confidence man bought several drinks and then began talking about a little game that was going on up stairs.

"I'm going up and play a few stacks," he said. "It's dull down here. You may come along and look on if you want to. Don't get into any game with strangers, however," he added, "for there are some pretty tough guys here to-night. If you want to play a small game, I'll get you a seat at my table after awhile."

Nick was not ready to leave the lower room, so he put the crook off and sat with his eyes on the door. He had a notion that it was about time for the men he had met earlier in the evening to make their appearance.

If they came, it would mean that they believed the valuable papers and maps to be there. They had been on the trail of the crooks for a long time, and Nick was quite willing to take a tip from them.

As he had explained to Chick, he was willing that the Death Valley gang should help him locate Hughart. Indeed, Hughart might be in that very building.

Presently four men entered the place, drank at the bar, and then started up the staircase. Nick saw that they were strangers there, judging by the attitude of the others in the room. They were tall, broad-shouldered men, and all wore full beards. It was plain that they were armed.

One of the men behind the bar called to the men as they started up the staircase.

"Where are you going?" he asked, stepping toward them.

"To a wine-room," was the reply.

Nick knew the voice. The men he had expected were there.

"Those are private rooms," said the attendant. "You can't go up there to-night."

The muscular fellows who had been watching at the door now advanced to the foot of the stairs. As they did so, four roughly dressed men entered and stepped back to the inner end of the bar.

"Four more from Death Valley," thought Nick. "They must have a regiment on this desert mine case."

"Why can't we go up?" demanded one of the men. "We have been there before."

"Not to-night," said the attendant. "Take seats down here."

The men hesitated. Then they saw that the people in the place were gathering about them with threatening looks and took chairs at a table, the eight close together.

The crook who was sitting with Nick arose and moved up to the bar, where he stood whispering to the man in charge.

As he did so Chick walked up to Nick as if to take an order.

"When the row begins," he said, "go to the back end of the room. I'll be there. We'll go up by the private staircase. I know where to take you."

Nick nodded and Chick brought two glasses of wine and placed them on the table.

Before the crook returned to his chair, however, the rush was made. Nick saw the desert gang springing for the stairs, drawing their revolvers as they went, and made for the back of the room, where Chick awaited him.

There came a shot, and in an instant the lights were out. Then followed more shots on the stairs, and a police call sounded.

The detective heard the outlaws breaking in the door at the head of the stairs, and then came more shooting in the hall above. All was confusion in the room below.

"Wild West manners," said Chick, "but don't quite catch on. The police will be here in a moment, and then

it will be all off for the Westerners. I can't see what they are up to. Can you?"

"It means," said Nick, "that they have located Hughart up there. They expect some will be arrested, but they think the others may be able to get them away. It is a desperate game. Think of this raid and all this shooting right here in the city."

"Come," said Chick, "now is the time. Up the stairs, and keep to the right when you get up there. I'll be right behind you."

CHAPTER VIII.

A CLEVER WOMAN.

As the detectives started up the stairs, which were not lighted, a woman's voice came from above.

"Who is there?" she asked.

Chick crowded past his chief before he replied:

"Waiter."

"What is going on down there?" was the next question.

"There's a gang of toughs making for the wine-rooms."

"Is it that crowd?"

"I think so."

There was a short silence, during which the detectives crept noiselessly up the stairs. In a moment Nick could feel the woman's skirt by reaching over Chick's shoulders. The gang was not yet in the hall connecting with the private stairs.

"Send Jim up to my room," said the woman presently.

"All right."

The woman was heard moving away, and the detectives followed her.

She passed down a narrow hall running toward an annex in the rear of the building. Presently she opened a door and the passage was flooded with light. The electrics in the annex had not been switched off.

The woman uttered a cry of alarm when she saw two men were following her, one in the uniform of a waiter and the other a stranger.

"What are you doing here?" she demanded. "Go back and send Jim up. Who is that with you?"

"Friend," replied Chick. "Business man, and I brought him up so he wouldn't get pinched. Put him away somewhere."

Chick made a sly motion toward his pocket. The woman understood. Many a man had been robbed in that place.

"I see," replied the woman. "Bring him in here."

She stepped into the room and motioned for the detectives to follow.

Nick now appeared to be very much intoxicated and Chick helped him along. The woman pointed to a small room at the side.

"Take him in there," she said, "then go and call Jim."

Nick was thinking fast. His first impulse was to secure the woman against outcry and make for the front of the building, for it was evident that the desert gang could not penetrate the annex. In fact, the noise of the disturbance came only faintly to the room where he was. If they discovered Hughart he wanted to be within reach of him.

It seemed like losing all the results of his work to remain there and permit the characteristic raid of the Western gang to proceed without his knowing what was going on.

Still, he had little hope of their finding the missing man. They had, however, satisfied him that he was in the power of the gang. Their desperate raid told him that much. Perhaps that was as far as they could lead him in the case.

"No one but a lot of robbers from the West would make such a break in New York," he thought. "They have an idea that they can pursue Arizona methods in the East. Well, they will find themselves mistaken when the police arrive. Anyhow, their earnestness convinces me that the place to work is right here. I presume Ten-Ichi is out there in the ruck, as I instructed him to follow the gang."

As Nick mused, studying out the problem, another voice was heard in the room he had first entered. The door between the two rooms was open, and he heard the newcomer saying:

"This will end the business for the whole crowd. The police are out there with guns and night-sticks. I guess the whole place will be pinched. They can't get in here, however. Everything safe?"

There was no reply that Nick could hear, but the woman was evidently warned that a stranger was in the next room, for she began speaking in whispers. Nick began to snore loudly.

"Asleep," whispered the woman.

"Drunk," said the other, "and he has a roll as big as a stovepipe."

Nick leaned back in his chair with his eyes shut, but he knew that the women were standing in the doorway looking him over.

Then he decided that he had struck the right part of the building.

A faint odor of musk came to his nostrils. There are many women in New York who carry the odor of musk, but the detective was certain that he had found the one he was looking for.

"I wonder why Jim doesn't come?" asked the woman who had admitted Nick to the room. "I sent a waiter after him."

"I presume he is busy," was the reply. "There's is a big fight on out there."

"It is the miners, I suppose?"

"Yes, and much good it will do them to come here and make a row. It might answer in their own country, but not here in New York. Oh, the cowardly murderers! To strike in the back! If I could get my hands on the right ones, there wouldn't be any trials."

"The right ones are probably in the building," replied the other.

This was becoming decidedly interesting!

If the women would only be a little more definite in their talk!

Still, what little he heard convinced the detective that he had made no mistake in his plan of action. The bandits had directed him to the right point. He was now more than ever convinced that Hughart was a prisoner in the building.

The time to settle this point was now, while the fight in front remained the point of interest, and he began to grow with impatience for the return of Chick or the appearance of Ten-Ichi, who had doubtless followed the wounded doctors to the saloon.

There was now no shooting in front, but a good deal of running around was heard, and doors were slamming, as if a general search or chase was on.

Fretting over his enforced inactivity, Nick decided to try a new plan. With a loud snort he fell from his chair and lay like a log on the floor.

One of the women came to the doorway.

"The drunken brute!" she cried. "We must throw him into the back room."

Acting on this suggestion, the women seized Nick and dragged him over a door-sill and left him. Then he heard a door close.

Opening his eyes cautiously, he found himself in utter darkness. The room was undoubtedly an inside one, for no windows were in sight.

He arose to his feet in order to get his bearings, if possible.

As he did so the room was flooded with light from electric globes far up on the wall, and a voice said:

"You awoke suddenly."

It was the voice of one of the women who had been talking while he sat in the next room. Nick looked around. There was no one in sight.

"Sit down in that chair in the middle of the room," commanded the voice. "You will be shot if you try any of your games."

It was that Nick was disgusted with himself but feebly suppressed his feelings.

At the critical moment he had permitted a woman to outwit him!

"I am not in the killing business myself," said the woman, "but there will soon be a person here who has no scruples in getting rid of spies and murderers."

Nick took the chair without a word. His hope was now in Chick and Ten-Ichi.

"You will never stab another man in the back," continued the woman viciously.

Nick was undoubtedly mistaken for one of the Death Valley gang!

He decided to keep up the deception.

"You are a sharp woman," he said. "You caught me just as you caught Hughart."

A low laugh came from the opening from which the woman was watching him.

"You're after Hughart, are you?" she asked.

"You know what we want," replied Nick. "Why not make it an even thing for both sides?"

"Oh, you want to compromise now, do you?" sneered the woman. "You didn't talk in that way until we got the top hand."

"We shall see about the top hand," replied Nick.

"You'll all be headed for the electric chair when we go out to the mine," continued the woman. "You're a fine lot of sneaks. I thought you Westerners above cutting in the back."

"I had nothing to do with killing your men," said Nick. "I was opposed to that."

He was hoping that the woman would go into the details of the murders, but she remained silent for a moment, and then said:

"That bum waiter you sneaked in here got his a moment ago."

Chick murdered!

Nick could not believe it.

"And the rest of your crowd has just been taken away by the police. They will be held for murder."

The detective did not believe this. There was still too much excitement at the front of the building.

Presently the noise grew louder, seeming to come from the room in which Chick had left him. Then the electrics were shut off and again he was in darkness.

He heard the sounds of a struggle, but had no means of knowing whether it was the police or the Death Valley gang fighting the crooks. Then came a shout:

"Kick in the doors, boys. He is here somewhere."

This was followed by heavy blows, and a door fell with a crash. Then another, and in a second the door to the room where he sat was attacked.

He sprang to a corner of the room and waited, his revolver ready at his hand.

When the door fell three men bounded into the room. They were not policemen, but Death Valley bandits!

One of the men advanced toward Nick.

"Here he is," he shouted. "Now hurry up. It's a fight to get out, I suppose."

CHAPTER IX.

A FRUITLESS RAID.

Nick was dragged to the square of light in front of the open doorway.

He appeared to be still under the influence of liquor.

The bandits regarded him with rage and dismay, holding him fast in the meantime.

"This is not the man we want," one of them shouted.

"Who are you?" demanded another.

Sounds of advancing footsteps were now heard from the direction of the private staircase.

"Quick!" cried one of the men, seizing Nick by the throat. "Is there any way out of this cursed hole? The cops are after us."

"They brought me here to rob me," faltered the detective, "and I can't find the way out."

"Some cheap sport," cried one of the gang. "Come on, boys!"

But Nick had no idea of permitting the bandits to escape.

After the desperate raid they had made they would hasten from the city.

He had no way of knowing how many members of the gang had been taken by the police, but he was determined that these three should not get away.

He knew that in such dens as he then found himself there were often double doors, the second one of metal and sliding down from the upper casing.

The Dominion had for years been the resort of thieves and murderers, and it would not be strange if something of the kind should exist in the room where, he had no doubt, many persons had been shot from the secret panel from which he had been threatened.

In fact, the very presence of the secret panel convinced him that the room was not protected by only a wooden door.

If anything of the sort existed, there should be a push-button on the outer casing.

He was already in the doorway, where he had been thrust by the outlaws for close inspection, and before the Death Valley men could move out he made a quick examination.

The button was there, and he stepped outside and pressed it. As he expected, a metal door slid from above and covered the opening. The women had been too sure of him to use the door, and had been too excited to think of it when the outlaws arrived.

As the metal door shot down Nick saw Chick and Ten-Ichi in the room behind him, the latter guarding the women, who were making frantic efforts to escape.

Chick disappeared in an instant, much to the amazement of the detective.

Then a familiar voice came from beyond the door:

"Throw up your hands in there! I have you covered!"

Then Nick remembered that Chick had informed him that he was thoroughly posted regarding the Dominion.

The means used to trap victims was now being used in the interest of the law.

Chick was there at the secret panel. Nick wondered if the outlaws were obeying orders.

He looked about for some way of reaching Chick. Ten-Ichi, understanding the situation, pointed to a door at the left of the metal one. Opening this, the detective found himself in a narrow hallway, at the end of which stood his assistant, with two revolvers pointing through the little opening.

"You're a brick," cried Nick. "What are they doing?"

"Holding up their hands," was the grim reply.

"Hold them a moment," said Nick.

He stepped back to the room where he had left Ten-Ichi and the women. The latter were protesting against being placed under arrest.

"Where are the police?" asked the detective.

"Sending crooks and outlaws in by wagon-loads,"—was the reply.

"Was it much of a fight?"

"Why," replied Tom, "it seems that the outlaws learned about this annex being in the possession of the crooks and organized the raid for the purpose of getting these three men in here during the excitement. When they were satisfied that this had been accomplished they scattered. I think, however, that some of them were arrested, and that others are sneaking about in order to give assistance to the three in there."

"They are in need of something of the kind," said Nick.

"Oh, you are detectives, are you?" said one of the women. Then she turned to Nick:

"I would have killed you had I known," she said angrily.

"By the way," said Nick, addressing the woman, "you may as well tell us where you have hidden Hughart."

"I know nothing about any such man," came the scornful reply. "The boys will be back here soon, and then you will get what's coming to you."

"The police are in charge of the place," said Tom.

"But they didn't get here in time," sneered the woman.

This meant, if it meant anything, that Hughart had been taken away before the raid or while it was in progress.

"Don't be too sure of that," was his reply.

"The police would never have thought of coming here," stormed the woman. "It remained for you to come sneaking in like a man ashamed of himself."

Nick had learned what he wanted to know. The police were in charge of the front part of the building, and were not likely to come there unless sent for. The crooks were scattered or under arrest, and the outlaws

had made themselves scarce, at least those who remained at liberty had.

There was now no danger of his being disturbed in carrying out the plans he had decided upon. Instructing Ten-Ichi to keep the women well guarded, he went back to Chick. Taking a position at the panel, he asked:

"Now who has the top hand?"

The outlaws swore volubly, and Nick laughed.

"I'm coming in there now to disarm you," said Nick, "but I leave a chap here who can do pretty good shooting. The man who resists will be killed."

"I wouldn't go in there for a million," whispered Chick.

"Some one must do it," was the reply.

"Then let me," insisted Chick. "I was only joking, you know."

Nick laughed at the sudden change of front.

"You thought to keep me out of danger," he said, "and, failing in that, you seek to take the risk upon your own shoulders. How many pair of handcuffs have you?"

"Two, but——"

"Never mind that," interrupted Nick. "You stay here and shoot if one of them lifts a finger. If you feel so about it, I'll lock the women in a closet and take Ten-Ichi in with me."

This plan was adopted, and in five minutes the three outlaws were disarmed and handcuffed.

"I don't believe you're a New York policeman," said one of the outlaws, glaring at Nick. "They don't do things in this way. We have been operating here quite a time, and this is our first experience of this kind."

"You are not discreet," smiled Nick. "You can't pursue Arizona methods in New York City. You can't stab people in the back here and get off scot-free."

"You're talking through your hat," said one of the men. "We are not assassins."

While handcuffing the men Nick had observed their hands and their clothing very carefully. He now drew one of the outlaws into another room and motioned him to a seat.

"No third degree goes with me," said the fellow. "You can't sweat-box me. Not on your precious life."

"I think I have something here which belongs to you," said Nick, without replying to the remark.

A look of astonishment followed the statement.

The detective took a key from his pocket and held it up in view of the prisoner, who gazed at it sullenly.

"Does this belong to you?" asked Nick.

The outlaw shook his head, but there was a look of terror in his face which Nick was not slow to observe.

"I know nothing of it," was the reply.

Nick then took from his pocket a few crumbs of modeler's wax.

"What about these?" he demanded. "Have you ever had in your possession anything like these crumbs?"

The outlaw tried to smile, but it was a ghastly attempt at mirth.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Do you notice anything like a peculiar odor about your person?" continued the detective. "The odor of iodoform, for instance?"

The prisoner started.

"When you went into the doctor business," said Nick, "you thought it necessary to smell of the shop, didn't you?"

"What do you know about the doctor business?" demanded the other.

"Very little," was the reply. "About as much as you do, in fact. But you set yourself up as a doctor, you and your friends from Death Valley."

The ugly look on the prisoner's face was growing.

"Men in your line of work should be careful about handling drugs which leave an odor on the person," said Nick. "Well, with this odor on you, you went to the Morgan apartment building, directly across the avenue from your rooms—we will not call them offices, nor will we enter into the details of your motive for locating there."

"This is all rot," broke in the outlaw.

"You visited the Morgan more than once. Your gang watched Hughart night and day. At last you stole the janitor's keys to Suites 9 and 10."

"It is a lie!"

"We shall see about that. The day you stole the keys you took with you a quantity of modeler's wax. You took the impressions of the keys there in the building, so as to return the keys as soon as possible. But before you returned the keys you unlocked the doors of the rooms."

CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN'S WAY.

The outlaw was now staring at the detective as if fascinated.

"Come to think of it," continued Nick, "you unlocked the doors the minute you got the keys. I presume you found them in the lock of one of the doors, though I am not certain of that. I say that you unlocked the doors at once, because you made the impressions in Townley's rooms."

"Why don't you come to the point?" demanded the prisoner.

"All in good time. Then you went to the rooms whenever you could and searched for the maps of the Death Valley Mine. It was your habit to go to Townley's room and watch Hughart through the transom, hoping that he would take out the papers for examination. Last night you watched from your window until Townley went out and then let yourself into his rooms."

"You are a fool," roared the prisoner. "You have no proof of what you say."

"Don't be impatient, my friend. The door connecting the two rooms was not locked, and when you heard Townley coming you slipped into Suite 9. Once there, you locked the door so that Townley would not bounce in upon you."

"What is the meaning of all this?" demanded the outlaw.

"You shall soon know," replied Nick. "You were afraid of being discovered if you turned on the electrics, as you could not work in the dark you soon left. But you unfastened the connecting door before you went. You should not have done that."

"This is all a fairy-tale!" shouted the prisoner.

"You returned to your rooms and watched Hughart's [illegible] with a spy-glass, which is now on the table in the north room at your headquarters. You saw Hughart come in, and, before long, you saw a woman enter — a tall, slender woman with blond hair and wearing a blue cloth coat."

There was dead silence.

"You were afraid of this woman. You had seen her [illegible] and you knew that she was working Hughart for the maps you wanted. You went across the street and waited for her to come down, probably with murder in your heart. You stood about the entrance to the building quite a long time, and, while there, you saw a man approaching Hughart, waiting about there like yourself."

The outlaw gave a violent start.

"Presently Hughart came down, the woman with him. Then you saw the woman pass something to the man who had been waiting."

The outlaw glared at his tormentor, but remained silent. His manner, however, expressed both surprise and fear.

"You knew you did not know that it was only the key to Hughart's rooms which the woman gave him. You thought it something of importance concerning the maps. As the man entered the lobby of the building you knew that he was made up to resemble Hughart, and you surmised at once that, with the connivance of the woman, he was going up to make a search of the rooms.

"You did not follow him, for you believed that Townley was in his suite, and that he would block the game, as the disguise was not a good one. In fact, you rather thought that the crooks were playing their hand a little too strong in sending a third man. You expected that the [illegible] would be discovered by Townley, perhaps even in his rooms.

"[illegible] you could not go to [illegible] without [illegible] would [illegible] Townley and [illegible] you would [illegible] 9, and so nothing happened. Later, you went back to the private hall and listened. Had the woman returned when you got there?"

"I never——"

"I ask you again," continued Nick, "was there a woman in Suite 9 when you went back to see how the dummy was coming on in his search? If so, you must have heard her voice. This is a question you can answer by yes or no."

"You are assuming——"

Nick checked the fellow with a motion of his hand.

"I am assuming nothing," he said. "I know that you were there. You left the odor of iodoform on the mat in front of the door. You must have laid your head down there in order to look under the door. You left scratches on the hall floor with that one long nail which projects from your left shoe. Again: Were the man and woman there when you went back after 10 o'clock? Your answer means more to you than you imagine."

The outlaw hesitated, scowling at the detective.

"Out with it!" cried Nick. "Tell the truth for once in your life."

"Yes, they were there," exclaimed the outlaw, with a fierce oath.

"I was certain of it," said Nick, "but I wanted the admission from you."

"You think that I went in and killed that man. Well, I did not. I don't know who killed him. I went away for a long time, and when I returned the woman was gone."

"Then what did you do?" asked Nick.

"I went into the rooms, of course."

"What time was it then?"

"Long after midnight."

"You did not see the woman leave?"

"I did not."

"Was there a light in Townley's room then?"

"There was not."

"Did you hear any sounds in there?"

"I did not."

"Do you think he was at home?"

"I know that he was not, for I listened and finally opened the door to his room."

"He might have been out when the woman was there the second time?"

"I think he was."

"Now," continued Nick, "what did you see when you entered the room? Tell the truth, for I know all about it."

"Well, I found the man lying dead on the rug."

"You did not notify the police?"

"No; I searched the rooms."

"Was the door fastened when you went up the last time. Was it necessary for you to use your key?"

"The door was ajar."

"Ah! How long had the man been dead, do you think?"

"I don't know anything about that."

"How long were you gone?"

"An hour or more."

"It is the theory of the officers that you found the man alive and killed him."

"They will have to guess again."

"One of your partners might have visited the rooms after you went away."

The outlaw refused to talk on this point.

"You were in the rooms nearly all night?"

"Until daylight."

"When did Townley return?"

"Not while I was there."

"Are you certain of that?"

"Certainly I am. I was listening for him."

Nick waited a moment and then asked:

"What were the woman and the dummy talking about when you went back the second time?"

"About getting the mine maps."

"Why do you all want these maps? Is it impossible to reach the mine without them?"

"If you had ever been in Death Valley you would not ask that question."

"You have no interest in the mine?"

"We found it first, lost it, and then Hughart and Townley came along and stumbled up on it. They shall not have it if we can help ourselves."

"Were the woman and the dummy threatening Hughart?"

"No, not especially. It seemed to me that they were going away somewhere with him, but I could not hear all that was said."

"Did they quarrel?"

"Not seriously."

"You heard them talking of Hughart's leaving the rooms?"

"Yes, and they talked openly about his being at Hall's place. That is why we came here. He was in this room that night, all right."

"Well, you made a fine mess of it up here."

"We should have succeeded only for you."

"Did this woman speak of quitting this gang?"

"They were both arranging to quit."

"I see."

The mystery was dropping away.

The detective began to understand.

"Now," he said, "there was a man killed in the hallway in front of your rooms? What have you to say about that?"

"Nothing. Say, you were in our rooms to-night?"

Nick smiled.

"You got one rum out, good and plenty. If we had known who you were you would not have escaped."

"Well, you did not know," laughed Nick.

The fellow would say nothing regarding the second murder. He seemed to want to clear himself of suspicion in the other case.

Both murders were mysterious, but light was breaking in one of them. But the other? Well, there were other clues to look up.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CROOKS FALL OUT.

While the detective was puzzling over the case, the outlaw regarding him with fear and admiration showing in his eyes, the sound of angry words came from the room where Chick and Ten-Ichi had been left in charge of the two outlaws and the women.

Nick opened the door and looked out. A heavily built man with a mustache dyed black and an evil face was shaking a huge fist at the women.

"You've robbed me," he was saying, "and I now give you in charge of these officers. You saw your chance when things were getting mixed and took every dollar from the safe. You're nice people, you are."

The women looked the man over scornfully and maintained a discreet silence.

The tough turned to Nick.

"I remember you," he said. "You came into the place to-night just before the raid, and you made for this room when the row started. That man there," pointing to Chick, "hired out as a waiter early in the evening. You are detectives, I suppose?"

"You have guessed it," replied Chick.

"Well, I want you to arrest these women. They have robbed the safe of $10,000. I will appear against them."

"When was this money taken?" asked Nick.

"Some time during the evening."

"But the women have been here ever since the row started."

"Then they took the money before that time. They might have taken it during the afternoon, for all I know. They had chances enough if they knew the combination, and they must have learned that or they could not have taken it at all, for the safe was locked."

"Where is the safe?" asked Nick.

"In a little room at the back end of the saloon."

"Near the private staircase?"

"Close to it."

"Is your name Jim?" asked the detective.

"Not for a minute," was the reply. "Jim is the bartender."

Nick glanced at the women. They threw him an appealing glance and turned their eyes away.

"Perhaps he took the money," suggested Nick.

"He wasn't here until just before the row began," was the reply.

"Where is he now?" asked Nick.

"I don't know. The police closed the place."

As the fellow spoke he glared angrily at the outlaws. It was evident that he knew something of the cause of the raid.

"These men came here," said Nick, "looking for a miner named Hughart. Where is Hughart?"

"I don't know anything about the miner," was the surly reply. "Some of the boys were trying to get his mine away from him, but I was not in the deal, and know nothing of their plans. What I want now is my money, and I want these women and these rooms searched."

"Search them, then," said Nick. "You know the rooms better than we do."

"We can look through the rooms later, after the women are taken away," said the proprietor, "but I want the women searched now. I believe they have my money on their persons."

"That will be attended to," replied the detective.

"Well," continued the enraged owner of the place, "if you have done your work here I want you to get out. I must get things in shape again."

The women flushed painfully when they heard the mention of police headquarters.

"I never took his money," one of them said. "I don't believe he ever had the sum he mentions."

"I am willing to be searched now," said the other.

The last speaker was the woman carrying the faint odor of musk. She evidently did not relish the idea of being locked up.

"Speaking of this mine," said the proprietor, "Molly knows about it. She was one of those who tried to get the mine away from me. Nick desires to question her closely in time, "that woman Molly is the one who laid the scheme on with him. She worked with the men trying to coax the secrets of the mine from him. She knows where he is if any one does."

"Where was she last night?" asked Nick.

"I don't know where she was. She was not seen about the place."

"I was in my room," retorted Molly.

"I know better," replied the proprietor. "You were out that evening. Come, now, you dig down and produce that money, or I'll send you over the road."

"I haven't got your money," declared Molly. "And when you come to talk about sending me over the road, that is a game two can play at. You had better be careful what you say and do, Ben Hall. If you accuse me of having your money I'll get even with you, and you will be found upon it."

"Curse you, you will be sent over the road, I'll guarantee," the proprietor declared.

"I was too hasty," he said finally, turning to Nick. "I guess I was a little hasty. If you'll give me a chance to talk with Molly alone I think we can fix it up."

"Not at present," was Nick's reply. Then he added: "You do not accuse the other woman?"

"Carrie? No. Carrie's all right. I don't know as Molly took the money, but it looks suspicious."

"Then there is nothing to hold Carrie for?"

"Not a thing, and you may as well release Molly, too. We can square our little matter between ourselves."

"I'll have to hold Molly," said Nick.

Molly looked disappointed. In a moment she turned and whispered to Carrie, taking good care that not a word should be overheard. She spoke rapidly, and Carrie nodded now and then to show that she understood.

"What is all this talk about?" demanded Hall.

"I'm sending her after a lawyer and a bondsman, and after my laundry," replied Molly, with warmth. "You don't think I'm going to remain in jail, do you?"

"Oh, I'll attend to that," said Hall.

"Indeed you won't," said the woman. "You've got your foot in it now, and you'll kindly let me alone. I'll attend to you later."

"What have I said?" asked Hall.

"You said I was mixed up in the scheme to get the mine. I wasn't."

"Yes, you were," roared Hall; "and the boys think you are trying to throw them down. You can't square yourself with them very easily, I can tell you that."

"I don't care what the boys think," said Molly.

"Where were you this afternoon, Molly?" asked Nick.

"Right here."

"All the time?"

"I never left the place. I have been here all day."

Nick turned to his assistants.

"Take the outlaws away," he said. "Be careful how you handle them, for they are a bad lot. See them locked up at headquarters on disorderly charges and then return."

"That looks like you wanted these rooms for an office," grunted Hall.

"And when you get to the street," continued Nick, turning to Chick, "send two policemen here to guard these rooms. Station them at the outer door there."

Hall turned away with an oath and went back to his wrecked barroom.

After a short talk with their chief, which was not heard by the others, the two assistants went away with the outlaws.

As they passed him, Nick said to the one he had talked with:

"I shall pay you a visit later if I find it necessary."

Nick waited until the policemen arrived, then, leaving Carrie in charge of one of them, he called Molly aside.

"Where is Hall's money?" he asked.

The angry woman refused to answer.

The room in which they were sitting was used as a sleeping-room in cases of emergency, but there was no

[illegible] it at this time. The dresser and wash-stand, however, were there.

While the woman looked on in angry amazement Nick began a search of the dresser. The drawers were locked, but he had no difficulty in opening them.

From the back of the bottom drawer, well packed away in papers, he dragged out a snow-white wig and a pair of spectacles.

"Where did you get these?" he asked.

"They are not mine," was the reply.

"Yet you wore them this afternoon."

"You are mistaken."

"You were seen with them on at the morgue."

The woman covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out some frightful sight.

"You admit that you were at the morgue?"

"Yes."

"Why did you go there?"

"To see the murdered men. One of them was my brother."

"Which one?"

"The one murdered in Second Avenue."

The case was becoming more interesting every minute.

"Do you know who killed him?" Nick asked.

The woman shook her head.

CHAPTER XII.

NICK TAKES A CHANCE.

"Do you know who murdered the man at the morgue," said Nick coolly.

Molly gave a quick start, but regained her composure in a moment.

"I know nothing of the affair," she answered.

At that moment there came a knock on the door. Nick opened it and looked out.

Chick stood there.

"They are landed, all right," he said.

Nick drew him aside.

"In five minutes' time," he said, "release Carrie, and see that she leaves by the side door of the saloon. I will be there to pick her up. Then leave the policemen here to search these rooms and take Molly to my office. This place may have to be searched later."

"Unless I am very much mistaken," said Chick, "a couple of those Wild West fellows are watching about the place. You may have company if you follow Carrie."

"So much the better," replied Nick. "It was the idea in the beginning to have the Death Valley crowd help discover the whereabouts of Hughart."

"But their first steer was a bum one," laughed Chick.

"They have helped some," replied Nick.

Five minutes later Carrie emerged from the side door of the saloon and turned toward the East River. At the same time a man in a modest suit of dark-brown whirled into the side street and moved along rapidly, whistling and swinging a cane as he walked. Two men standing across the street followed along in the shadows.

The detective's disguise was a good one. He had turned his reversible suit, removed his false mustache, washed the convivial red from his cheeks, and lined his face just a trifle, in order to make himself look older and thinner. No one who had seen him at Hall's place would have recognized him now.

He passed Carrie at a swinging pace and turned at the next corner. There he waited in a convenient doorway for her to pass. As she did so the two men crossed to the north side of the street, upon which the girl was walking, and followed on behind her. Nick crossed to the south side of the street and walked along in silence, keeping abreast of the girl.

"This is rather a chestnut," he mused, "releasing a suspect and following after, and Carrie may not go to Hughart. Yet she is not a very wise person, and I am sure that Molly told her to communicate with him."

Nick knew very well that the two outlaws who were following the girl were on the same mission as himself. The gang had not yet given up the notion of finding Hughart and securing what they wanted, by fair means or foul. They had shown both nerve and cunning in the game, as far as it had been played, and he looked for some unusual developments from them before the night was over.

Their presence complicated matters, but the detective could only follow on and take chances when the time came. Nick's idea was that they expected to locate Hughart and remove him from the city by force. The fact that several members of their party were under arrest, he thought, would not prevent those at liberty from hastening off to the mine if they gained accurate knowledge concerning it. It looked to Nick as if the leader had not been taken, and things would be kept moving as long as he was in the city.

So the battle with the bandits was by no means ended.

After walking several blocks Carrie entered an all-night restaurant not far from the river and seated herself at a table. From the opposite side of the street Nick saw the outlaws peering through the windows of the place, evidently in doubt as to the advisability of entering.

Carrie ordered a cup of coffee and a sandwich. The waiter who brought them remained at the table for a moment and then talked briefly with a sporty-looking fellow who sat behind the desk, apparently the cashier.

Nick sauntered in and took a stool at the lunch-counter, not far from the table where the girl sat. As he did so, the cashier approached the girl and opened a whispered conversation with her.

"You'd better cut it all out," Nick heard him say.

"According to your own story, things are getting mixed. You let them take care of themselves."

Carrie whispered something which the detective could not hear. Then the cashier said:

"Like a wild man. Getting tired of waiting, I guess."

Another whisper from the girl.

"No, he has not been down here. Afraid, I guess. You keep out of it."

The girl bent closer and whispered at length.

"I'll take the message," said the cashier next.

Nick paid his bill and left the place. The two watchers were still on the opposite side of the street.

As soon as Nick passed the square of light in front of the restaurant he turned into a stairway which led to the upper part of the building, which was only three stories in height and without an elevator. The hallway was not lighted, and as soon as the detective stepped inside, he was in darkness, broken only by a dim light coming through a transom over a door connecting with the restaurant.

Turning to look back, he saw that the watchers were crossing the street. Fearful that they might seek shelter in the stairway and so discover him, Nick passed on to the first landing. There was a dim light here, but the transoms above the doors showed that the rooms opening from the hall were in darkness.

He passed on up the second flight of stairs and found himself in a narrow hallway with a window at each end. Lights showed in all the four rooms on that floor.

Nick went to the back window and looked out. There was a fire-escape there, and he stepped out and hung to the rungs, his head on a level with the window-sill. The windows of the rear room were open, and the detective heard voices. They did not appear to come from that room, however, but from an inner one next to it.

The fire-escape was available from the windows of the back room, and Nick moved along and looked in. As he suspected, there was no one there. He could not see into the inner room for the door was not in line with the window.

There was, however, a door in line—the door of a closet, and this was ajar.

"It is up to me to take a chance," muttered Nick, and in a second he was in the room making for the closet.

Before he reached the place of shelter, however, a figure appeared in the doorway connecting with the inner room. Then a man sprang forward. In an instant Nick had his revolver leveled.

He knew from the description and from the imitative make-up on the man who had been murdered at the Morgan that the man he saw was Hughart.

"I have been looking for you, Mr. Hughart," Nick said coolly. "You may as well come with me."

Then a woman's scream came from the inner room, and Carrie appeared in the doorway. She had gained the room by means of a stairway from the restaurant.

The detective confronted the pair with his threatening revolver.

"Not a word," he said.- "Come! We want you, Hughart."

"What for?" demanded the miner.

'We want you to make an explanation."

"An explanation? Of what?"

"You'll learn that in time," was the reply.

"And if I refuse to go?"

"Then you will be taken by force."

Then Nick scented danger. He saw the eyes of the pair travel past him and fix themselves on the door leading to the hall.

It is an old trick to place a person off guard, but this looked real to the detective. The terror in Hughart's eyes was not simulated.

Without lowering his weapon Nick turned about.

He was too late.

As he did so a lariat shot out from a muscular hand and fell over his shoulders.

No one but a man from the Wild West could throw a rope like that.

The rope was drawn taut, with the detective's hands and arms between it and his body. He seemed helpless in the power of the bandits.

He had not counted on such quick action on their part.

Hughart and the girl sprang for the inner room as the lariat fell, but one of the outlaws, gun in hand, barred the way.

"Well, Hughart," he said viciously, "it has come to a show-down at last."

"What do you want?" demanded the miner.

"We want the mine maps."

"I haven't got them."

"You know where they are."

"I do not. They were stolen from me."

Nick began to understand the situation a little clearer. At that time he had no further use for Hughart.

He was not a prisoner, and Nick knew why.

"Then you must come with us to the desert and point out the mine," said the other.

"And be murdered afterward," cried Hughart excitedly. "I may as well die here."

He made a spring for the outlaw, avoided the shot, and grappled him. The man who had been guarding Nick sprang forward to help his companion, and in a second the detective was out of the rope and in the fight.

Before the second outlaw could draw his gun Nick landed a heavy blow on the jaw which sent him to the floor like a dead man.

Hughart was fighting like a madman, but would have

been bested had the detective not hastened to his assistance, settling the outlaw with a terrific blow.

Hughart gazed at the detective in amazement.

CHAPTER XIII.

BULLY COMES TO GRIEF.

"That was quick work," said Hughart, "but I did not expect to see you helping me."

"I had an idea," replied the detective, "that I wanted a little of your society myself."

Then Nick turned to the girl.

"Go down-stairs," he said, "and telephone to police headquarters. These men are suspected of murder."

"Who's talkin' about the police?" said a voice, and the next moment a burly man appeared in the doorway of the inner room.

He was almost a giant and carried himself with the air of a fighter. The muscles on his arms and neck stood out like cords, and there was an ugly leer on his depraved face.

"I am talking about the police," replied Nick. "I want these men sent to headquarters. They are suspected of murder."

"Go chase yourself," thundered the bouncer, "you can't bring no police up here while I'm around."

Nick saw that there was trouble ahead, and got ready for it.

Hughart turned away.

"Wait," said Nick. "You are going with me as soon as these men are taken care of."

"He don't have to go unless he wants to," sneered the bouncer. "You can't come up here an' run this place."

Hughart turned back and said:

"I have no idea of going with you. You helped me out here a moment ago, and I thank you for that, but there the ways part."

"It will be to your interest to listen to me," said Nick.

"How do I know that this is not part of the game?" demanded Hughart. "You come up here like a spy, and then these men come. You may belong to the gang, for all I know, and I'll not go with you."

"That's the stuff," declared the bouncer. "Say the word, an' I'll throw him out of the place. You don't have to pay attention to him."

Nick was in rather a tight box, for he did not know but the outlaws might regain consciousness in a minute and come to the assistance of the bully. Besides, Hughart would be apt to oppose him in case of a fight. Whatever was done must be done at once.

He turned to Hughart.

"You are wanted as a witness in a murder case," he said, "and you may as well come along without making trouble."

"A murder case?" echoed the miner. "What do I know about a murder?"

"You know all about the murder which was committed in your rooms," replied Nick.

"This is the first I have heard of it," said the miner, a look of fear on his face. "Who was murdered there? Who did it?"

It was easy to see that the man was lying.

"He's givin' you guff," roared the bouncer. "Shall I put him out?"

"Wait a minute," said Hughart. "Perhaps he is telling the truth."

"You say you have lost the mine maps?" asked Nick.

"I surely have," was the reply.

"But you know who has them?"

"I have my suspicions."

"Well, come along quietly and you shall know all about it."

Nick was getting angry, and, to tell the truth, was aching for a blow at the bouncer, but he thought it best to use peaceful measures first.

The developments of the night had convinced the detective that Hughart would make trouble if an attempt to take him by force was made. He understood why the miner did not want to be delayed longer in the city.

"Get out!" roared the bouncer. "Don't be kicking up a row here."

Nick stepped backward to the door opening into the hall and gave a shrill call on his police whistle.

In a second the bouncer was making for him, not with a weapon, but with his brawny fists, which had doubtless put more than one man out of business.

Nick met him half-way. The fellow put up his hands in prize-ring style, but it was of little avail. Nick is a past master in the art of boxing, and the bouncer went to the floor to join the outlaws.

Then Nick found himself threatened with a revolver in the hands of Hughart, the man he had come there to protect!

The girl screamed and covered her face with her hands. Hughart turned for a second to warn her against making an outcry, and that was enough. The miner went down under a blow which would have killed a man of less strength.

Carrie gave a scream of fright and anger as Hughart fell and turned toward the inner stairs leading to the restaurant.

"It looks like a slaughter-house," she said.

And, indeed, she was not far from right. There were four men on the floor whom the detective had put out of business for the time being. He smiled as he thought what would have resulted had they all attacked him at once.

"Wait until the police come," said Nick to the girl. "You are to go with me."

"Indeed I'm not," was the angry reply. "I was arrested once to-day, and they were glad to let me go."

"Where do you wish to go?" asked Nick. "Do you want to communicate the news to your friend Molly, who sent you here?"

"I don't know what you are talking about?" said the girl.

"Come, come," said Nick, "I am the officer who had you under arrest up at Hall's place. You were released in order that you might show the way to Hughart's hiding-place. Molly, by the way, has been taken to my office, and you can see her there."

The girl stepped back in wonder.

"You must be Nick Carter," she said. "No other man could so disguise himself and do what you have done here."

"The same, at your service," replied Nick, with a laugh.

"Then I suppose I'll have to go with you," said the girl, "but you won't get anything out of me."

Presently the police came—two patrolmen who had heard the whistle.

Nick made himself known, told them to see that the outlaws were taken to police headquarters, and asked one of them to call a carriage.

When the carriage arrived, Nick, the girl, and Hughart entered and were driven away. The latter was still unconscious from the blow he had received, and had to be carried to the vehicle.

"You gave him a good one," grinned one of the officers.

"It was that or nothing," replied Nick. "See that those men are safely handcuffed and locked up. When the wagon comes one of you remain here and close the place."

The officer pointed to the bouncer.

"What about this one?" he asked.

"Look him up," was the brief reply. "There are plenty of charges to make against him. He's a tough, but not so tough as he thinks he is."

Arrived at the office, Hughart and Carrie were placed in separate rooms. The latter at once asked for Molly, but was not permitted to see her at that time. Hughart was beginning to show signs of consciousness.

Chick appeared as Nick entered his private room.

"You are making quite a collection to-night," he said. "Molly is making things hum in that little room."

"What does she say?"

"That you shall be made to suffer for her detention."

"That is cheerful," said Nick. "Has she been searched?"

"Yes. Mrs. Knight left her not long ago."

"She found the money?"

"Certainly."

"I am sorry for the woman," mused Nick. "She is in bad shape just now."

"About the robbery?"

"Worse," replied Nick. "Is Townley here?"

"Yes. He's in the black room, kicking like a steer."

"Does he know what has been going on?"

"Not a word. Say, chief, I really can't see what you are working at. You have found Hughart, but we started out to solve two murder mysteries, I think."

"They are solved," replied the detective.

"Solved?" echoed Chick. "Why, I haven't heard about any arrests being made on the charge of murder."

"And yet," said Nick, "all the guilty parties are under arrest. I think they are all under this roof, but that may not be correct."

"Including the person who committed the murder at the Morgan?"

"Certainly. That person is here. It is about the other case that I am in doubt. We shall know before the night is over, however."

"You beat all the record," cried Chick. "Of course, it must be true, if you say so, but I can't understand it, all the same."

"Has Townley asked about Hughart?" asked Nick.

"Half a dozen times."

"Seems anxious, does he?"

"Yes."

Nick laughed.

CHAPTER XIV.

NICK'S PRIVATE COURT.

"And so Hughart did not want to come," said Chick, after his chief had related the occurrences at the restaurant.

"Of course not," was the reply. "He was never under duress. He just hid himself for a purpose. Bring Townley, Hughart, and Molly in here. I am going to hold a little court of my own. Be sure that there are no weapons in the bunch, and keep a close watch on Molly."

Filled with wonder, Chick hurried away, and the three were soon seated in the private office.

Hughart and Townley did not appear to be especially glad to meet each other. Molly hung her head sullenly, but Chick thought he saw a secret signal pass between the girl and Hughart.

"Now," began the detective, "while I am questioning one the others must remain silent. That is the way to accomplish results."

He then turned to Townley and asked:

"When did you first begin to doubt the honesty of Hughart in the mine matter?"

Hughart glanced up angrily, but remained silent.

"I never doubted it," was the sullen reply, and Hughart seemed satisfied.

"You knew that Hughart and Molly were getting pretty thick?"

"I saw them together."

"And you thought that Molly was trying to coax the maps from Hughart?"

"Of course, but I thought he was square."

"Now, why did you lie to me about the time you was in Hughart's room on the night of the murder?"

"I did not lie to you," was the reply.

"Yes, you did. Let me tell you about your movements that night. You went to your suite quite early. You knew that Molly was to be there. You went into Suite No. 10 and secreted yourself in the closet."

Townley gave a start of protest, while Hughart turned white with anger.

"You hid in the closet and waited there until Hughart and Molly came in. There you remained during their talk. You learned that they were about to leave the city together, presumably for the West."

Townley glanced at his partner, and his eyes fell.

"You heard the whole plot, and left the closet only after Hughart and Molly went away together. You did not know that a Death Valley man had occupied your rooms only a moment before your return. You did not know that as you passed into Hughart's rooms this man slipped into the private hall and so on to the elevator."

Townley shuddered at the thought of being so near to one of the men who had made several attempts on his life.

"Therefore, you lied to me about not being in Hughart's rooms until after 10 o'clock that night. After you went away from the rooms you left the building and spent the night drinking. How do I know all this? The marks in the closet are those of your boots. You had not slept the night following the discovery that Hughart was about to throw you down. Your bed had been mussed when I got there, but it had been disturbed only with the intention of showing that it had been slept in. How do I know that you heard the talk between them? You must have heard it if hidden in the closet, and your subsequent conduct shows that you did hear it and was angry with Hughart."

Townley did not reply.

"If you had occupied your rooms that night, and had not slept too soundly, you would have known in the morning who committed the murder. But the conversation which took place there that night, after you left, was heard. I mean the talk after you left the room after calling on Hughart for the last time that night. It was heard by one of the Death Valley gang."

Molly was gazing at the detective like one hypnotized as he went on with the story. Her face turned red and white by turns, and her black eyes glared hideously.

"I admit that I was in the room early in the evening," she said, "but I did not go back. I remained at home. Mr. Hughart can tell you that."

Hughart remained mute. Nick turned to him with a question:

"When did you first get the notion of swindling Townley out of his share in the mine?"

"I couldn't swindle him," was the sour reply. "I guess he could have claimed his share at any time."

"But you arranged to get money from a person not before in the deal and make for the desert. Your idea, doubtless, was to get to the mine with a small force hired in the West, strip it of the best in sight, and cut away."

"How do you know that?" demanded Hughart. "I had no such notion."

Molly again started to interrupt, but checked herself.

"When you left the rooms that night," continued Nick, "you never expected to go back. You meant to give the impression that you had been foully dealt with."

"Well, what of that?" demanded Hughart. "I had been hounded by the Death Valley people, and watched and bulldozed by the New York bunch, until I was tired of it all."

"Why didn't you let Townley in on your last deal?"

"What last deal?"

"The one which contemplated a sudden flight with only a little money—enough to get to the mine with a small escort and strip it?"

"There was no such deal on."

"You are not telling the truth," replied Nick. "There was such a deal on, as you know very well. You will be obliged to admit it before leaving this room."

Molly gazed at Hughart significantly. She was evidently trying to convey to him a warning. Townley again became alertly attentive to what the detective was saying.

Nick now turned to Molly with the question:

"How many prison sentences have you served?"

The woman shrank from the detective's keen glance.

"You know as well as I," she said, while Hughart's eyes began to show suspicion.

"How many for attempted murder?"

"I have been wrongfully convicted," was the reply.

"An easy explanation," laughed Nick. "How many for robbery?"

Molly remained silent.

"You know where you are headed for now, I presume?" continued Nick.

The woman turned pale and seemed about to fall from her chair.

"Let me tell you how it came about," said the detective. "You were detailed by the crooks to get into the good graces of Hughart and betray him. You were to secure the mine maps and then see that he was put out of the

way. The gang did not consider Townley, for he did not have possession of what you wanted."

Molly sprang to her feet with a denial on her lips, but sank back into her chair without uttering a word. Hughart was eying her sharply.

"After you got well into the game, you saw that it would be easy to turn against the gang and reap a richer reward, so you put up a job with Hughart, who could not be induced to give up the maps."

"I was next to the game," said Hughart.

"That is not true," continued Nick. "You believed in this woman. She told you that she was tired of the life she was leading, that she wanted to abandon it. You doubtless explained to her that it would require quite a large sum of money to get to the mine in shape to defend it. You knew that you would be followed by the Death Valley people, if by no one else, and that you must have an armed escort."

Hughart sank back in his chair with a groan.

"Then," continued Nick, turning to the woman, "you suggested that you might be able to get the necessary money. You had in mind at the time the robbery of Hall's safe. You were to steal the money and fly with Hughart. Is that it?"

"I never thought of robbing Hall," was the reply.

"Not long ago," said Nick, "Hall accused you of robbing him of $10,000, and the money was found on your person."

Molly gasped, but made no reply. The detective was too close to the truth.

"When you went up there on the night of the murder, you told Hughart that the money had been secured, and he decided to leave the rooms with you at that time. He was to go to your rooms at Hall's place and wait for you. But you were not playing square even with Hughart. You secured the key to his rooms and passed it over to the man you were standing in with. He was to search the rooms once more, and, if he found anything that would lead you to the mines, you were to abandon Hughart and depart with the man who was murdered."

Hughart sprang to his feet and Molly quailed before him. Nick ordered the miner to remain quiet and was obeyed.

"This was not quite judicious," continued Nick, "for, it is folly to believe that Hughart would leave anything of account in his rooms when he thought he was leaving them for good. But the best of us make mistakes. Another mistake you made was in going back to the rooms. There you quarreled with the crook whom you had discovered as Hughart. I don't know what you quarreled about, but it is probable that he knew of the robbery of Hall's safe, knew that you had the money secured on your person, and demanded a share of it. He may have threatened to reveal your connection to the game.

"It is quite immaterial what was the key to it. He had found nothing in the rooms, and probably understood that you would be off with Hughart and the $10,000 before morning. He may have opposed the Western trip, preferring to spend his share of the money in gambling-houses. Anyway, you quarreled, and the quarrel was a bitter one. You saw your plans failing because of his opposition, and you——"

Molly sprang to her feet again, her eyes wild, her hands clenched.

"Yes," continued Nick, coolly, "you saw your plans failing, and you waited until the crook was off his guard and then you murdered him."

"It is all a lie!" shouted the woman. "All a lie!"

"We shall see," replied Nick.

CHAPTER XV.

MYSTERIES SOLVED.

"It is all a put-up job," shrieked the woman. "I did not return to the room that night after leaving them with Hughart. I was with you all the time, wasn't I, Hughart?"

The miner lowered his eyes to shut out the appealing glance of the accused woman and made no reply.

"You were heard quarreling with the dummy," continued Nick. "The man who heard you was hidden in the private hallway, waiting for an opportunity to make another search of the rooms—one of the men from Death Valley."

"And do you think one of those murderers would tell the truth?" demanded the woman. "You can't convict me with such testimony as that."

Nick took from an inner pocket of his coat a long parcel and began to remove the covering. Presently a large-sized dagger was disclosed. Molly gave a cry of rage and fear when she saw the weapon.

"You habitually carried a weapon," Nick said. "For some days you carried this. You became frightened after you struck the blow and fled, leaving the knife in the wound. It is not your knife? Why, the faint odor of musk, which you even now wear, is plainly discernible. It is only a matter of detail to learn where you got this knife, and to find people who saw it in your possession. Look at it, Hughart."

Nick spoke sharply and thrust the knife under the miner's nose. Hughart sprang back. His face was livid. His hands trembled. His eyes were starting from his head.

"Don't bring it near me," he cried.

"You have seen it before?" demanded Nick. "Now, tell the truth. You may not be held as an accomplice in this murder."

"Yes, yes, I have seen it before," he cried. "When we were talking of going West together I gave it to Molly. She can't deny it!"

"He killed the man himself and used his own knife," cried Molly. "Now he is trying to lay the crime on me. Coward!"

"Hughart was not in the room when the murder was committed," replied Nick. "Now," continued the detective, turning to Molly again, "tell me why you went to the morgue to inspect the bodies."

"I have told you that," was the low reply. "The man killed in the hallway was my brother."

"Yes," said Nick. "He was your brother, and he was killed because he was in the disguise of a miner. He was trying to get into Suite No. 9 to carry away the knife with which you murdered the disguised man. You remembered that you had left it in the wound—you probably ran from the room the moment the blow was struck—and you disguised your brother and sent him after it, probably considering him the only person you could trust with the guilty secret."

"Cit, you—you devil!" screamed the woman, wringing her hands in anguish.

"You gave him the key to Suite No. 9. Oh, yes, you did, for it was found in his pocket. I can't understand why you took the key, unless you had a notion that Hughart might want to sneak back there and get his clothes.

"Your brother did not succeed in getting into the rooms. Probably he did not arrive at the building in time. After failing in this, he hung about the place until he attracted the attention of the Death Valley people, who were watching from their windows with spy-glasses.

"Now, let me tell you why he remained in the vicinity of the building. He wanted to see Townley in a last attempt to secure the dagger. He could not have gained his end by seeing him, but he did not know that. He had an introduction to Townley from you, by the way."

"That is false."

"He carried with him the nugget pin you had induced Hughart to give you. I think he would have represented himself as coming from Hughart, and produced the pin as evidence of the truth of his statement, if he had reached him. The pin was found in an inner pocket of his vest."

Molly glared at the detective, but said not a word.

"When the Death Valley men saw your brother hanging about, they penetrated the thin disguise and induced him to enter the stairway. You know what took place there. Why did they kill him? Because they had had enough of New York crooks disguised as miners. You must remember that one Death Valley man had seen the dead body of the other crook. They doubtless figured that Hughart's disappearance was chargeable to this disguised man as well as to the other. They were enraged at losing their man, and they killed your brother, as much out of spite as anything, I guess. They might have believed he had possession of the maps. At least, they searched his pockets before they threw him into the street. It is needless to say that they did not find the pin. I have that in my possession now."

Hughart glanced up with a show of interest.

"I gave it to Molly last night," he said.

Molly glared at the miner, but remained silent.

The scene in Nick Carter's private office was now a strange one. Molly was sobbing with her face buried in her hands. Hughart was trembling at the thought of his narrow escape. Townley showed rage and resentment at the treatment he had received at the hands of his partner. Chick was gazing at his chief with wonder showing in his face.

"When you sent Hughart away to the rooms over the restaurant," continued Nick, addressing Molly again, "you suspected that the Death Valley people knew where he was hiding. That was a lucky move for me, for it led to the capture of the leader of the desert gang, the man who murdered your brother."

"How do you make that out?" asked Chick. "I thought that murderer was still unknown."

"The man who did the killing joined the painters," said Nick. "I found in a closet off the gang's rooms three pairs of overalls and three jackets daubed with paint. One of the jackets had a smear of blood on the front. The murderer had donned it before taking the time to wash his hands. Just a little blood escaped from the wound, but enough to stain the fingers that held the knife. This jacket was the largest one there, and there was a slit in one of the sleeves.

"Now, the man who committed the murder wore this jacket. He was a large man. He carelessly daubed paint through the slit. Very well. He put the jacket on over his other coat, and on the coat-sleeve of the big man captured at the rooms above the restaurant I saw a smear of paint, long and narrow, just such a daub as would be likely to come through a long cut in the cloth of a jacket.

"Then both murderers are under arrest?" asked Townley, fixing his eyes on the woman, who seemed distracted with grief.

"That is about the size of it," replied Nick. "It has been a quick job, but the game has been a lively one."

"What about Carrie?" asked Chick. "Is she to be held?"

"We may as well wait and see if the chief of police wants her as a witness," replied Nick. "She probably knows about the murder at the Morgan."

"Not a word," said Molly. "She is innocent. Let her go."

"I presume I shall be permitted my liberty now," said Townley.

"I had you locked up to keep you out of the way," said Nick. "You may, however, be needed as a witness. I leave that to the chief of police."

"I am tired of that cell," said the miner.

"Talk to the chief," replied Nick.

"Am I held as a witness?" asked Hughart.

"Certainly," said the detective.

Nick now turned to his assistant.

"Call in the policemen," he said, "and send the four to headquarters. Carrie is in the room where you placed her."

"Wait," said Hughart. "I want to know about the mine maps. Where are they?"

"You ought to know," replied Nick.

"Where are they, Molly?" asked Chick, with a smile.

The woman turned to Hughart and asked:

"Were they not returned to you?"

"Not yet," was the reply.

Chick took a package from his pocket.

"Here they are," he said. "They were found when the woman was searched. You see, Hughart, she had the money and the maps, ready to give you the ha-ha if she could have gotten to her confederates."

"I was a fool to give them to her," said the miner. "Put them in your safe, Mr. Carter, until I call for them."

Then the policemen came in and the four were taken away, Molly screaming and fighting the officers on the way to the wagon.

"They are taking me to the electric chair!" she shouted.

"I guess that is no idle dream," said Chick soberly.

Nick turned gravely away.

"We have solved the murder mysteries," he said, "and I am going to bed. It is now up to the prosecuting officers to do their duty."

And in five minutes' time the office was dark.

THE END.

The next number, 513, will contain "A Game of Big Millions; or, Nick Carter's Fight with a Bull."

ABOUT THE EARLY NUMBERS OF THE

TIP TOP WEEKLY

WE receive hundreds of letters every week from readers asking if we can supply the early numbers of Tip Top containing Frank's adventures. In every case we are obliged to reply that numbers 1 to 500 are entirely out of print. We would like to call the attention of our readers to the fact that the Frank Merriwell Stories now being published in book form in the Medal Library are inclusive of these early numbers. The first book to appear was No. 150, entitled "Frank Merriwell's Schooldays." We have herewith a complete list of all stories that have been published in book form up to the time of writing. We will be glad to send a fine colored catalogue of the Medal Library which is just filled with good things for boys, upon receipt of a one-cent stamp to cover postage.

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251—Frank Merriwell's Danger.
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[illegible] Frank Merriwell in Class.
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